

# Graphic Health Warnings on Tobacco Packages

Fact sheet 14: Smoking blocks your arteries

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Smoking cigarettes is known to contribute to the development of atherosclerosis. Atherosclerosis occurs when there is narrowing and clogging of the arteries which reduces blood supply, and the amount of oxygen available, throughout the body.<sup>1</sup>

Cigarette smoke damages the cells lining the blood vessels and makes clots more likely to form in blood vessels. Smoking cigarettes also contributes to the build up of fat deposits that collect on the inner lining of the blood vessels. This leads to scar-like tissue and atherosclerotic plaque.<sup>2</sup>

Smoking causes 43 percent of atherosclerosis among males and 35 percent among females.<sup>3</sup>

Compared to non-smokers, someone who has ever smoked is 40 percent more likely to develop atherosclerosis<sup>4</sup> and a current smoker is 150 percent (2.5 times) more likely to develop the disease.<sup>3</sup>

Atherosclerosis is the main underlying problem in cardiovascular diseases such as heart disease, stroke and other forms of blood vessel disease such as peripheral vascular disease and abdominal aortic aneurysms.<sup>5</sup>

Cardiovascular disease is the second leading cause of death in New Zealand, just behind cancer. In 2004, ischaemic heart disease accounted for 6,313 deaths in New Zealand (22.0 percent of all deaths that year) and stroke for 2,806 deaths.<sup>6</sup>

Quitting smoking will reduce your chance of developing heart disease. After one year of not smoking your risk of heart disease is halved. Fifteen years after stopping smoking your risk of heart disease is the same as a non-smoker.<sup>7</sup>

Your risk of stroke also decreases after quitting. Between five and 15 years after quitting your risk of having a stroke is the same as a non-smoker. <sup>1</sup>

Men who smoke are also more likely to develop impotence than non-smokers, due to reduced blood flow to the penis caused by atherosclerosis. Even without atherosclerosis, smoking can lead to the temporary constriction of blood vessels (vasoconstriction), which also reduces blood flow to the penis.<sup>2</sup>

Want to quit smoking? The most important thing is to make a quit attempt. For help, talk to your doctor, pharmacist, quit smoking provider or call the Quitline on 0800 778 778 or visit The Quit Group web site at [www.quit.org.nz](http://www.quit.org.nz)

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Sources:

<sup>1</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. 2004. *The Health Consequences of Smoking: what it means to you*. US Department of Health and Human Services, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, National Centre for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2004. [http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/sgr/sgr\\_2004/00\\_pdfs/SGR2004\\_Whatitmeanstoyou.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/sgr_2004/00_pdfs/SGR2004_Whatitmeanstoyou.pdf) (accessed 11/02/08)

<sup>2</sup> American Council on Science and Health. 2003. *Cigarettes: What the warning label doesn't tell you*. Second edition. New York, American Council on Science and Health, 2003. [http://www.acsh.org/publications/pubID.206/pub\\_detail.asp](http://www.acsh.org/publications/pubID.206/pub_detail.asp) (accessed 11/02/08)

<sup>3</sup> English & Holman et al. (1995). *The quantification of drug caused morbidity and mortality in Australia*. 1992 edition. Canberra. AGPS

<sup>4</sup> Holman & Armstrong et al. (1990). *The quantification of drug caused morbidity and mortality in Australia 1988*. Canberra: AGPS

<sup>5</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2004. *Heart, stroke and vascular diseases - Australian facts 2004*. AIHW Cat. No. CVD 27. Canberra: AIHW and National Heart Foundation of Australia (Cardiovascular series No. 22). <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/cvd/hsvd04/hsvd04.pdf> (accessed 11/02/08)

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Health: New Zealand Health Information Service. 2007. *Mortality 2002 and 2003*. Wellington, 2007. <http://www.nzhis.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexns/stats> (accessed 11/02/08)

<sup>7</sup> *Smoking Cessation Guidelines for Australian General Practice*. 2004 Edition. [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-publicat-document-smoking\\_cessation-cnt.htm/\\$FILE/smoking\\_cessation.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-publicat-document-smoking_cessation-cnt.htm/$FILE/smoking_cessation.pdf) (accessed 11/02/08)