

Graphic Health Warnings on Tobacco Packages

Fact sheet 8: Smoking can make you impotent

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Men who smoke are more likely to develop impotence than non-smokers, due to reduced blood flow to the penis caused by 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.¹

Even without atherosclerosis, smoking can lead to the temporary constriction of blood vessels (vasoconstriction), which also reduces blood flow to the penis.²

Impotence, or erectile dysfunction, is the constant inability of a man to maintain an erection for sexual purposes. It is twice as likely to occur in smokers than non-smokers. Exposure to second-hand smoke is also a significant factor in becoming impotent.³

Sexual functioning requires the coordination of several functions in the body. This includes the nervous system (mental stimulation) working in coordination with hormones, and the vascular system which pumps blood into the muscle tissue that maintains the erection. Smoking can affect all these systems, thereby, causing impotence.⁴

An international study⁵, which grouped impotent smokers according to how many cigarettes they smoked each day, found:

- heavy smokers (40+ cigarettes/day) had the "softest" night-time erections;
- smoking was related to an abnormal decline of blood pressure in the penis.

It is possible to fully or partially recover erectile function by quitting smoking. The likelihood of recovery depends on the degree of damage that has been inflicted, and which 'system' has been affected. The greater the length of time spent smoking, the greater the damage to the biological systems that cause impotence.⁵

Men who have reported losing their erections before orgasm have completely reversed this situation by quitting smoking.⁵

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

Sources:

¹ 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 (accessed 11/02/08)

² American Council on Science and Health. *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 (accessed 11/02/08)

³ Feldman, H.A., Johannes, C.B., Derby, C.A., Kleinman, K.P., Mohr, B.A., Araujo, A.B, McKinlay, J.B. *Erectile Dysfunction and Coronary Risk Factors: Prospective Results from the Massachusetts Male Aging Study*. Preventative Medicine 2000; 30:328-338.

⁴ Feldman, H.A., Goldstein, I., Hatzichristou, D.G., Krane, R.J., McKinlay, J.B. *Impotence and its Medical and Psychological Correlates: Results of the Massachusetts Male Aging Study*. The Journal of Urology, January 1994; 151(1):54-61.

⁵ Hirshkowitz, M., Arcasoy, M., Karacan, I., Williams, R., Howell, J. 2004. *Nocturnal Penile Tumescence in Cigarette Smokers with Erectile Dysfunction*. Urology, February 1992; 39(2):101-107.