

## QUIT SMOKING FOR YOUR KIDS!

November 14, 2004

Those of you who know me know that I am a relentless anti-smoking nag. Let me tell you why. When I moved here from California four years ago, I was amazed to find that people could smoke in restaurants with a few feet of separation from the “non-smoking” section. As one pulmonologist (lung specialist) I know puts it, “smoking in one part of the building is like peeing in one part of the pool—it goes everywhere and you don’t want to be in it”. In California, there is no smoking in any restaurant. It is such a pleasure to never have to worry about our exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). For my daughters and me, it’s a vital issue, since we have asthma. But there are a tremendous number of risks associated with passive smoke exposure, even for non-asthmatics.

Let me also preface this by saying that I used to smoke...back in my teens when I was young and rebellious (a.k.a. stupid). When I got accepted to medical school at the age of 20, I decided that was the end of that—I didn’t want to be a hypocrite pushing a healthy lifestyle and not living one myself. So I understand the habit, but I don’t understand parents continuing to smoke when they are literally putting their children’s lives in danger.

The body of evidence connecting passive smoke exposure to health problems is overwhelming, and continues to grow. Because of their small size and developing bodies, kids are much more sensitive to ETS effects. In utero, the fetus smokes when the mother smokes, with toxins and nicotine passing across the placenta. A recent study showed that pregnant women exposed to ETS gave birth to babies that scored 6-10 points lower on IQ testing later in life. It’s long been known that this same effect occurs when pregnant women smoke, but now it’s proven true for second hand exposure. Think about all those pregnant waitresses in the smoking section...

Despite the many warnings, 44% of women who smoked prior to pregnancy continue to do so while pregnant. Besides lowering the IQ of their children, they are also causing lower birth weight babies, more miscarriages and stillbirths. The risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) is increased in smokers’ babies, with the risk increasing even more if they have both pre and post-natal exposure. ETS is estimated to cause 1900 annual deaths from SIDS in the U.S. Prenatal smoking has also recently been shown to double the risk of colic. Anyone who’s lived with a colicky baby would probably do anything to avoid it!

Kids who make it through the pregnancy and newborn period have even more problems down the road. The worst of these is asthma. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve walked into an exam room in my office to see a wheezing child, only to be blasted with the strong smell of smoke. These parents seem to think I’m psychic when I ask if they smoke outside—“how did you know I smoke?” Sometimes the smoking family member isn’t even in the exam room, but the smell is evident on the child and other parent. They don’t realize how much exposure there is even if they smoke outside or in a

car with a window open. These kids might get better in my office with respiratory treatments, but I'm afraid to send them back home to that toxic environment. I've seen more than one case like that where they went home, got worse immediately, and had to be admitted to the hospital, where they magically improved. ETS is estimated to cause 8000 new cases of asthma every year, and up to one million asthma exacerbations in kids. Smoke exposure while driving in a car is 23 times more toxic than in a home, presumably due to the concentration of toxins in the small space. For this reason, Canadian officials have proposed outlawing smoking in cars carrying children.

ETS is well known to greatly increase the risk of all respiratory problems, not just asthma. Ear infections, pneumonia and sinus infections are all much more common in children of smokers. I'm always amazed by smoking parents who ask me, "why is my son/daughter always sick?" They don't seem to believe it when I tell them—those kids who are "always sick" are usually either children of smokers or in daycare. The difference is, the daycare kids get better as they get older. The smokers' kids just get worse.

Some other facts that might surprise you:

- ETS increases the risk of cavities, especially in baby teeth
- ETS is associated with an increased rate of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- ETS exposure in older kids is also associated with a lower IQ (even without prenatal exposure)
- ETS worsens school performance, especially in reading
- ETS is associated with aggressive behavior in kids
- ETS doubles the risk of a child developing a Conduct Disorder, which is also associated with risk of criminality
- Prenatal smoke exposure is associated with obesity and diabetes in adults
- Kids whose parents smoke have a much higher chance of taking up smoking themselves, and at an earlier age
- Smoking related illnesses cost \$4.6 billion annually in the U.S. (in adults and kids)
- ETS causes 3000 deaths from lung cancer in non-smokers annually
- ETS can trigger heart attacks and coronary artery disease even more than smoking!

Last, but not least, don't you want to be around to see your grandchildren? My grandmother was a smoker and died of emphysema. I watched her literally being suffocated to death over several years. The rest of her body was fine, even at 90. I wish my kids could have known her—she was a cool lady, and probably would have lived to be over 100 if it wasn't for the cigarettes. Of course, she got hooked in the 1920's, when cigarettes were advertised as an aid in digestion, among other things. Today, there is no excuse.

If you smoke and you have kids, please quit now. While you are quitting, show that you care for your child's health by never smoking in the house or in the car. Get started by participating in the Great American Smokeout on November 18. For more information on this and help with quitting: Call the American Cancer Society quit line **1-800-ACS-2345** or checkout their website [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org), or government sponsored program [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov). For some local help, Sandy Kenyon at Spotsylvania High School 834-2500 has a smoking cessation program for teens. For adults, Mary Washington Hospital offers a program run by Caroline Fuller at 741-1334. For more information on ETS in children, check out the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids at [www.tobaccofreekids.org](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org) or call (202) 296-5469.