
RAWHIDE HEALTH – MEDICINE IN A BETTER WAY

St. Maries, Idaho – Telephone 208.582.3056 – RawhideHealth.com

The Cancer Stick

Session One

by Dr. Dale J. Ross, M.D.

If you do not smoke but wish to know more about the impacts of smoking, the article may be worthwhile for you. Otherwise, if stopping smoking for you or a loved one is not truly important in your life, I would ask that you not bother to read this article until you are ready to consider this and look forward to the future articles that will come.

A cancer stick, that is what a cigarette has been known by. It has also been called a best friend, a break, an escape, an icebreaker, a nervous habit, and a rite of passage. I have known many people that have had just these views for one reason or another. Most of these people started smoking because they wanted, at that moment and time, to look older, to be “cooler,” to be younger, to fit in, to prove something. I do not know of many people currently smoking that would prefer to continue if it was simply a matter of asking for it to be gone.

Medically, smoking has dramatic consequences above and beyond what the average everyday Joe realizes. Yes, lung cancer is real and everyone has at least heard the fact that cigarettes cause it; the death and disease from this alone is stupefying when looked at as the cause of lost life all on its own. Have you heard that it also causes: colorectal (colon), head, neck, and throat cancers, kidney, liver, urinary tract, renal pelvis, ureter, and bladder cancer, mesothelioma, myeloid leukemia, nasal cavity and sinus cancers, pancreas, penis, stomach, and uterine/cervical cancer. It is also linked with breast and skin cancers. Cancer is a nasty and ugly process in the body, but smoking does much more than just cause cancer.

COPD and emphysema are part of the much more frequent spectrum of lung complications that show up with long-term smoking. These are the common reasons that come out when a patient begins wondering why they get “winded” so much easier than they used to, at a much younger age than they should have. It is also related to more colds and pneumonias getting someone down for “the last 3-4 weeks” that they could not shake. COPD and a host of other ailments are what robs you of years upon years worth of life and vitality of life.

Nicotine itself is a stimulant. Now how can that be since everyone knows as soon as you take a hit of that cigarette, when you really want one, is that everything can just ease off and “it calms me down.” That sense of relief is purely drug: addiction physiology. You give the drug and the body releases endorphins to tell you thank you. Endorphins are that feel good or at least lessen the tension part of getting nicotine. The body itself however is doing exactly the opposite. The heart rate increases, blood vessels constrict, blood pressure goes up, then the lungs are robbed of oxygen and a stress response kicks in pushing these things further. This is only the short-term impacts from lighting up. These and

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more reasons are exactly why smoking has such a huge impact on cardiovascular disease. Smoking plays havoc with the immune system, is murder on the heart and vascular system, ages the skin considerably, and even increases the rate of diabetes development. There is also a significant impact on the financial side and on taught coping from generation to generation.

Jerry Reed put out a great song about smoking – *Another Puff (1970)*; how he loved it, how he hated it, how he would argue with himself about why it was “good” to smoke. If you know of Jerry Reed’s music, you might be able to imagine how tongue-in-cheek, and how accurately, his portrayal of a desire to quit smoking is. He hits on a number of the points I frequently hear when someone comes to me asking about, or I bring up, reasons to smoke or stop. Smoking is a personal choice. It is not something that I as a physician say must happen for any particular individual, because that is meaningless. What is meaningful is for an individual to come to a point that they would like to do things to strengthen their health and live better. That, I am not just glad to be a part of, but thankful that I may be of help if I can.

The Cancer Stick- session two will follow