
RAWHIDE HEALTH – MEDICINE IN A BETTER WAY

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

The Cancer Stick

Session two

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.

I would ask that you not bother to read this article if stopping smoking for you or a loved one is not important in your life.

A patient came to me, rather scared really one day. He wanted to quit smoking. He had just had his first heart attack and he really really did not want another one. I understood why; he was just reaching his mid-fifties, he wanted to start enjoying more of those special times in life, and now he just found out that he had blown out the outside wall of his heart – that part did not squeeze anymore. We took account of how he lived and what things he chose to have/be/do in his life; what was important. He worked long hours, he downed some coffee for breakfast, ate what his wife sent him for lunch, had a late supper, and went to bed to get up and do it again. There were many places we could have started, but the fact that he managed to get in smoking three packs of cigarettes a day kind of jumped right up there to the top. This was the biggest bang for the buck and it was essential for him to learn why. Then we could start on those other things, as he learned how to change and improve his health, to see just how good his life could become. All of this was only because this man was ready for the changes; he wanted to make a difference and make his life better. The saddest part for me was that it took having his first heart attack before he could see how important this was – it was the saddest for him too.

He was very motivated then. He did not want small steps and planning out for the next few weeks. He wanted to be completely done with cigarettes and he was a little afraid that he might die trying. We talked for quite a while that first day. We came to some decisions and I would see him again in two days. I ended up seeing him and talking through the things he needed help with twice a week for a time – and he was successful. He was real concerned when his cough got worse for a short time, but this was because his lung cells were coming back to life and started pushing that heavy gunk up out of his bronchioles. He was amazed when he stepped out of his house one morning and “I smelled that smell of new mown grass, you know, like when you were a kid.” He had not smelled that in years because of the internal changes there as well. He was just as happy, although a bit conflicted, when he became the first person in the house able to detect the new grandsons diaper needs – the world was waking up for him again. Food flavors came back, his energy went up, and he was putting what he spent on cigarettes in a jar to see what would happen.

There are several important points coming from this. I hope they come through and can be a help to those reading. I usually try and get some hard and fast numbers out for smokers in the way of cash incentive too. Cigarettes are going for \$3.50-\$5.50 a pack right now. The lowest end would be just over

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\$100 per month or over \$1,200 per year in direct cigarette cost for a pack a day smoker. Add in fuel and time to get them as well as time spent not doing something else more productive and you have an impact. The fact that you are paying over a thousand dollars a year to hurt your body and tear it down makes the cost all the more. At the higher price and smoking a little more you start getting bigger dollar signs: almost \$500 per month and \$6,000 per year for a 3 pack a day smoker. Now I do not know too many people that couldn't use an extra \$100, \$200, or \$500 a month. The question that I have then is, is your life worth putting that money towards helping to build yourself up rather than taking it down?

Another point comes from a study in a Colorado community that banned smoking in public places a few years ago. At the end of the next year, there was over a thirty percent decline in hospital presentations for acute cardiac issues. That means people going to the ER for a heart attack. It was not that thirty percent of smokers quit, or thirty percent of the community started eating better. The only change for the community was that there was less cigarette smoke rolling around in everyday places. This study has been undertaken in other U.S. cities and European countries with the same dramatic results.

When I was performing autopsies, it was not the lungs that I looked at to identify the smoker, I could but I did not need to. I looked at the aorta, the largest artery in the body. The aorta of smokers was a brittle, bent, and twisted version of fragile PVC pipe that had been left out in the sun, rain, and snow for too many seasons. It would crumble away under my hands. It was not a smooth, soft, supple, muscular conduit pump as it should have been. So that it is understood, I am not here and now shouting to mandate morality and choice, but I do know the real consequences of a problem; the toll it takes on my patients, their families, and what it does to perpetuate the problem. I also know words are easily said and written, life is hard; stopping the control of the nicotine drug addiction is life altering. A Vietnam veteran that I worked with summed it up best for me in this, "I could do anything, I could make anything good or bad as I wanted, stop what I chose and move on. I even did the hard stuff (heroin) over there; I have been able to do anything in my life, but I can't give up this d*** cancer stick (while he lifts one out in front of us; it standing as it were independently before us). It is my best friend and I hate it."

The effects of smoking are real and it hits home for me. My father is no longer around to be a role model and a guide to my children or his great grandson, or his other children and grandchildren. The cost of smoking is not worth it.

Contact me or another doctor if you are not sure how to quit smoking yourself.