

Second Hand Smoke and Children

By Suze Hargraves

Ever see a pre-teen, even pre-school kid with a smoking habit? If you smoke in a home or car with a child in it you've got one. The American Lung Association says that "Of children 3 to 11 years of age, almost 60 percent, or 22 million, are exposed to secondhand smoke. " Between 150,000 and 300,000 lower respiratory infections in babies less than 18 months old are caused by exposure to second hand smoke.

If you think lungs are the only thing affected in a child by second hand smoke think again. Second hand smoke causes a buildup of fluid in the inner ear resulting in 790,000 children visiting healthcare providers ever year for middle ear infections.

50-75 percent of U.S. children have a chemical called "cotinine" in their blood. Cotinine is what nicotine breaks down to in the blood.

Smokers don't affect children with just second hand smoke. You see, smokers live shorter lives and leave behind younger children. 8.6 million people in the United States have a smoking related illness. Among those illnesses, according to the ALA, are chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD, including chronic bronchitis and emphysema), coronary heart disease, stroke, abdominal aortic aneurysm, acute myeloid leukemia, cataract, pneumonia, and periodontitis. Cancers also occur due to smoking in the following areas: bladder, esophagus, larynx, lungs, mouth, throat, cervix, kidney, stomach, and pancreas. Smoking is also a major factor in a variety of other conditions and disorders, including slowed healing of wounds, infertility, and peptic ulcer disease.

If we don't want our children to smoke, *we have got to quit smoking*, long before they're even old enough to even know what a lighter is. Parents, grandparent, aunts, uncles, cousins, babysitters, and friends- anyone around your child who lights up is effectively giving your child a cigarette. As adults we've got to **stop**. We're not only setting an incredibly bad example, but we're making our kids sick and even contributing to their death.

Don't have any illusions that I think quitting is easy or that I believe people who smoke are somehow weak. I don't. Smokers are addicts. I was one. I started smoking in 1976. I quit smoking in 1986. I started again in 1998. I quit again in 2007. I'm still in quit status and plan on staying there for the rest of my life. It's not easy to quit and for some people, like me, it's not easy to stay quit, but it can be done with the right support, new life habits and a strong, workable plan.

If you or someone you love smokes call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-ACS-2345 for information about the Fresh Start Program. If you're a patient at White Mountain Community Health Center call 447-8900 for more information and support. Other avenues of support are hypnosis, acupuncture and other alternative approaches. Use what works. Keep trying different things until you find something that works.

Quitting isn't just about you. It's about our future; our children.

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