

Smoking and eye health

Tobacco use plays a role in many diseases, which can ultimately lead to death or disability. With over 4000 chemical compounds present in inhaled smoke, several of which are known to cause cancer, it's no surprise that the effects of smoking can be so destructive.



The main cause of health effects of smoking is carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide is a colourless, odourless, deadly gas present in automobile exhaust. It is present at more than 600 times the concentration considered safe in industrial plants. Carbon Monoxide binds with the blood cells preventing affected cells from carrying a full load of oxygen. This in turn can lead to hypoxia which is a state of oxygen deficiency in the body, preventing the tissues from functioning adequately.

A smoker's blood typically contains 4 to 15 times more carbon monoxide than that of a non smoker meaning less oxygen reaches

your eyes, brain, and vital organs.

The health effects of smoking on the heart and lungs are well known. And there is growing evidence that the effects of smoking on vision may be significant, and can double your chance of sight loss in later life.

How does smoking damage my eyes?

Cigarette smoke enhances oxidants, which are the chemical by-products in the body that can damage cells, including those in the eyes. There are strong links between several diseases of the eye and smoking, including cataracts and age-related macular degeneration (ARMD).

Research has shown that if you smoke, you have a two to three times greater risk of developing cataracts than a non-smoker. Night vision may also be affected.

A medical report has shown that "smoking is a major cause of Age Related Macular Degeneration." According to these reports, individuals aged 65 years and over double their risk of developing ARMD if they smoke.

When cigarette smoke is inhaled, thousands of chemicals get into your bloodstream and travel throughout the body. These chemicals cause damage to the macula (the most sensitive part of the retina, at the back of your eye). Tiny blood vessels can burst through the macula, leading to irreversible damage, or alternatively, cause the cells of the macula to slowly die. Both ultimately lead to a loss of vision.

What is Age Related Macula Degeneration?

The macula is central part of the retina at the back of the eye and is used for detailed vision. As the eyes ages, the central area can 'wear out' – a process that is described as macular degeneration (ARMD). Although it is can cause detailed central vision to worsen gradually, peripheral vision often remains unaffected.



What happens if I stop smoking?

The good news is that if you stop smoking the risk of losing your sight decreases over time. Research has shown that people who stopped smoking 20 years ago have a similar risk of developing ARMD as non-smokers.

What if I smoke and already have ARMD?

An Ophthalmologist (eye specialist) would recommend that if you have ARMD that you should stop smoking immediately to prevent further damage.

Why are regular eye tests important?

Regular eye examinations are a vital health check – it can detect eye diseases before you notice any effect on your sight. Early treatment can often prevent your sight from getting worse. The RNIB recommend having an eye test once every two years or annually if over 70 or advised by a health professional.

Useful Contacts for help with giving up smoking

If you would like help or advice on giving up smoking and reducing the risk of developing ARMD and losing your sight in later life, the following numbers may be useful.

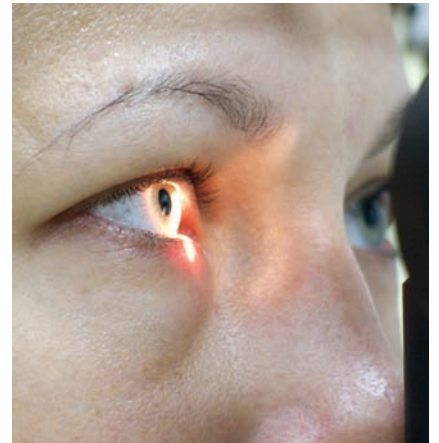
Quitline 0800 00 22 00
NHS Helpline 0800 1690 169

websites you may find helpful:

www.nhs.uk/gosmokefree

www.quit.org.uk

www.Click2Quit.co.uk



For advice or more leaflets, please call

0800 85 44 77

or visit us online at

www.outsideclinic.com

