

Macular degeneration, cataracts linked to smoking

Yet another reason not to smoke.

A strong link between smoking and development of an extremely serious eye disease called **age-related macular degeneration** now is being widely reported in eye care trade journals, as well as general news outlets.

Researchers from Great Britain's University of Manchester say their studies show smoking to be the direct cause of age-related macular degeneration (ARMD), a leading cause of blindness, in about 54,000 British citizens.

Results imply that at least one-fourth of all cases of ARMD causing severe vision loss or blindness are due to smoking.

Many people with macular degeneration lose at least a portion of their central vision (ability to see straight ahead) because of damage to the macula found in the back inner lining of the eye (retina), where light-sensitive cells process images.

Secondary smoke also causes eye damage

But macular degeneration isn't the only eye disease associated with smoking.

A Chinese University of Hong Kong study also has found strong links between smoking and toxic damage to the eye. Second hand smoke, depending on the amount of exposure, also can create similar dangers for non-smokers.

Smoking damages the eye in various ways, including its effects upon tiny blood vessels (capillaries) that help carry oxygen and nutrients to crucial structures of the eye such as the natural lens, retina, and optic nerve in the inner back of the eye.

Smoking and toxic effects harm eyes

Toxins associated with smoking may decrease blood flow or cause clots to develop within eye capillaries, thus cutting off vital nutrients essential for eye health. Smoking also causes development of fragmented molecules known as free radicals, which can disrupt normal function of otherwise healthy cells and lead to eye disease.

Other eye conditions where smoking may be a risk factor include:

- **Cataracts:** Studies have shown that people who quit smoking earlier (rather than later) decrease their risk of developing cataracts.
- **Diabetic Retinopathy:** Study results appear mixed about a direct association between smoking and diabetic retinopathy, but most experts agree that smoking should be avoided to help stop progression of the disease.
- **Glaucoma:** Smoking causes shrinkage or constriction of blood vessels, shown to be directly linked to rising inner eye pressure (intraocular pressure) that can lead to glaucoma and accompanying optic nerve damage.
- **Graves ophthalmopathy:** This is a condition in which muscle control of the eye is disrupted, often associated with thyroid





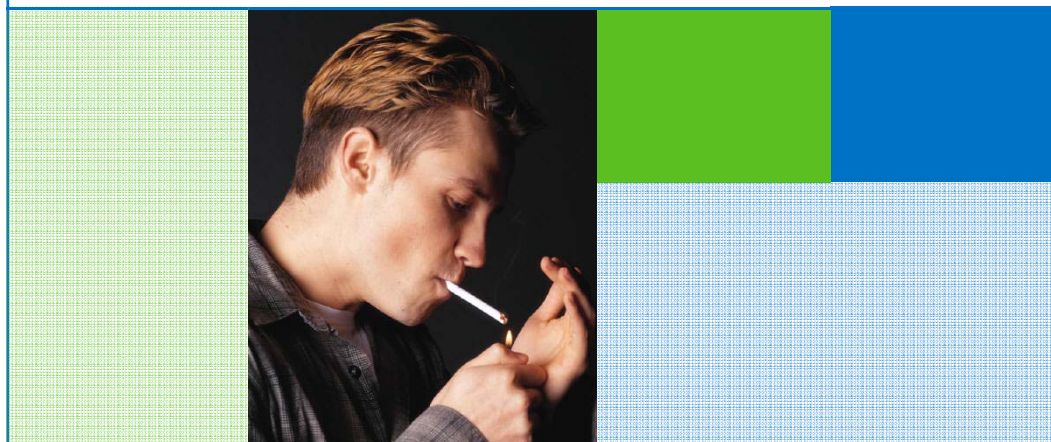
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Ophthalmology

Smoking causes serious eye damage



Information for patients

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