

THE ECONOMIC TIMES ON SUNDAY

wellness WATCH

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# Kick the 'butt'

Quit smoking. For, you could reduce your risk of falling prey to diseases by almost 100%

**O**CTOBER 2, this year, can truly be called momentous. Not just because we celebrated the birth anniversaries of Mahatma Gandhi and Lal Bahadur Shastri. Nor because Eid too was celebrated that day. Amid the traditional gaiety and fervour, the day, in fact, stood out for the world's biggest public smoking ban to come into effect — arguably one of the most important social and health legislations to kick off in India.

Of course, the opposition to the ban is fierce and the onus of adherence and compliance completely rests on the people and the authorities. But the fact that a bold step has been taken to stub out a deep-rooted health hazard may at least make people think about stopping smoking. For records, India is the third largest market for cigarettes, with up to 250 million smokers and an equal number of, if not less, passive smokers. And the fall-out on health is anybody's guess.

Although the fine on smoking in public places is mere Rs 200, here's why the ban assumes significance. Doctors say about half of all the people who continue to smoke will die because of the habit. In the US alone, tobacco causes nearly 1 in 5 deaths, killing about 440,000 Americans each year. Based on current patterns, stats bear it out that smoking will kill about 650 million people alive in the world today. If these patterns continue, tobacco-caused deaths worldwide are expected to increase from about 5 million per year today to about 10 million per year by the 2030s. What's worse, most of these deaths will happen in developing countries like India, clearly establishing that smoking is the single most preventable cause of death in our society. That's scary. But on the flipside, ever since smoking was banned in public places in the US, cigarette smoking has declined from about 42% of the population to about 20.9% (the latest year for which numbers are available). Most hospitals have also recorded appreciable drop in the number of people reporting cardiovascular diseases and cancer — the two most deadly diseases caused by tobacco use.

Let's understand how a casual puff becomes habitual and how health hazards get 'dragged' in. Explains Dr Ambrish Mithal, senior consultant, endocrinology, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital: "Smoking is addictive and dangerous because it has effects on the respiratory system and cardiovascular system. One of the most dreaded effects of smoking is lung cancer. Smoking also increases the risk of diabetes complications such as foot

**Can Quitting Really Help A Smoker?**

Yes. It is never too late to quit using tobacco. The sooner smokers quit, the more they can reduce their chances of getting cancer and other diseases.

**20 Minutes After Quitting**  
Heart rate and blood pressure drop

**12 Hours After Quitting**  
The carbon monoxide level in blood drops to normal

**1 to 9 Months After Quitting**  
Coughing and shortness of breath decrease, lungs get cleaned and risk of infection is reduced

**5 Years After Quitting**  
Stroke risk is reduced to that of a non-smoker 5 to 15 years after quitting

**1 Year After Quitting**  
Excess risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a smoker's

**15 Years After Quitting**  
The risk of coronary heart disease is that of a non-smoker's

**2 Weeks To 3 Months After Quitting**  
Circulation improves and lung function increases

**2 Weeks To 3 Months After Quitting**  
Circulation improves and lung function increases

**10 Years After Quitting**  
Lung cancer death rate is about half that of a continuing smoker's. The risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, oesophagus, bladder, cervix and pancreas decreases

problems, kidney and eye diseases. Latest data also shows that smokers have a greater risk of fractures, both among men and women."

Dr Mithal says even those who put tobacco in the mouth — such as spit, ghutka and snuff — greatly increase their risk of oral and pharynx (throat) cancers and they may also have problems with high blood pressure and be at increased risk for heart disease. "Unfortunately, the effects of smoking are seen not only among smokers, but also in the people around them," he adds.

Indeed, the smoke that thrills, also kills. Simply because cigarette smoke contains more than 4,000 poisonous substances which cause various diseases, even death. Among these are cancer-producing substances, carbon monoxide, nicotine, and other irritating substances. Doctors say tar and carbon monoxide irritate and damage the lining of the lungs when you breathe in air with cigarette smoke. This later turns into smoker's cough. As this gets worse, you produce more and more phlegm. These warning signs are your body's way of trying to protect you from the smoke.

If you ignore your body's warnings and continue to smoke, you are likely to suffer more often from colds and flu, as well as bronchitis, pneumonia, and other more serious chest infections. Eventually, you could get emphysema, an irreversible condition when part of the lung is completely and permanently damaged. As the disease gets worse, you will have difficulty in breathing and may hardly be able to walk. Cigarette smoking is the most common cause of emphysema.

Smoking is one of the major causes of heart disease. Nicotine raises blood pressure by constricting your blood vessels and making your heart work faster. Cigarettes contain carbon monoxide, a poisonous gas, which cuts down the oxygen reaching your heart by up to 15%. Nicotine promotes fat build-up on the walls of your arteries, damaging them and decreasing blood flow, resulting in heart disease and heart attack. No wonder smoking doubles your risk of dying of a heart attack!

Dr Amit Bhargava, senior medical oncologist, Max Healthcare: "Smoking increases your risk of dying from lung cancer by 8 to 20 times. Nine out of 10 people who die from lung cancer are smokers. Smoking increases the

Source: Internet  
risk of developing cancer of the mouth, throat, and esophagus by 2-20 times.

The risk of cancer also increases even in organs not directly exposed to tobacco smoke. These include the pancreas, kidneys, urinary bladder and probably the cervix. "But even if you don't have any serious complication, smoking makes breathing harder, causes wheezing, coughing and headaches, and damages your sense of taste and smell. It causes premature wrinkling of the skin, bad breath and stains your teeth and fingernails."

As for non-smokers living with smokers, they have a 35% increased risk of getting lung cancer compared to non-smokers living with fellow non-smokers. Smokers' children are more likely to get bronchitis, pneumonia and other chest infections, especially in their first year of life. Chronic cough and phlegm are also more frequent among children of parents who smoke. In the workplace, chronic exposure to tobacco smoke reduces airway function to the same degree as smoking 1-10 cigarettes a day.

Indeed, all smoke and much fire. The only good news, however, is that once you quit the habit, you can reduce your chances of getting cancer, heart attack and other diseases.

Time to kick the 'butt'.  
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