

Does smoking reduce sperm count? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I heard somewhere that smoking reduces your sperm count. Is this true? How else, other than being a carcinogen, is smoking harmful?

Scared of Smoking

Answer

Dear Scared of Smoking,

Worried about your chances of having children going up in smoke? Some research suggests that exposure to a variety of toxic substances, including those in cigarettes, can damage sperm and/or lower sperm count. Sperm imperfections and mishaps are to be expected, given the sheer volume of sperm in one ejaculate. However, it seems that they occur at a higher rate in men who have been exposed to certain toxins, drugs, alcohol, and radiation.

Previously, women were the sole target of a campaign for healthy babies. Women were advised not to smoke during pregnancy because of the health problems it can cause to an unborn child. Now we know that it is not only the mother who needs to be aware of the dangers of smoking.

While the risks of smoking on male fertility need more research to be fully understood, a father's nicotine use could lead to higher risk of medical problems for the child. Once a woman is pregnant and/or a child is born, it's important to avoid exposing them to second hand smoke, also called environmental tobacco smoke.

As for the second part of your question, well... do you want the long answer, or the longer answer? Point being that, even leaving cancer out of it, the list of smoking-related health problems is pretty daunting. Let's look at some of the big disease categories first:

- Cardiovascular — includes high blood pressure, high cholesterol, stroke, coronary heart disease, and heart attack
- Lung — includes chronic hoarseness, chronic bronchitis, and emphysema
- Dental — includes tooth decay, gum disease, and chronic bad breath

- Miscellaneous — includes osteoporosis, ulcers, and diabetes

Smoking can also create a slew of other types of problems. For example, smoking can lead to greater complications from diabetes and can speed up the damaging effects of multiple sclerosis (MS). Many smokers develop circulatory problems, are short of breath, and have low energy levels. Smoking can bring on early menopause and menstrual disorders in women.

And the list goes on... and on... and on, no ifs, ands, or "butts." Good for you for seeking out information and here's to a tobacco-free future.

Alice!

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