

An article taken from the **Menopause & You** online program

# Smoking and Menopause

It comes as no surprise that smoking contributes to heart disease, the primary cause of death in women. It also causes significant lung ailments. Smoking has unique effects on women, prompting earlier menopause, worse hot flashes and fragile bones. Dr. Freedman explains this clearly in the following article and provides even more reasons for kicking the habit.

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Cigarette smoking can affect the timing of the onset of menopause, the intensity of the symptoms of menopause, and the incidence of osteoporosis after menopause. Women who smoke need to recognize these risks and do their best to kick the habit.

## **Smoking's Effect on the Onset of Menopause**

Menopause occurs when the ovaries cease to produce estrogen. A gene, Bax, and a genetic receptor, Ahr, are responsible for the onset of menopause when they become activated. Researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital have discovered that the chemicals in smoking directly activate these genetic components, creating what they call a "specific pathway" to killing ovarian cells. It has been found that women who smoke more than ten cigarettes a day are 40 percent more likely to go into menopause earlier than nonsmokers. Generally, women

who smoke will enter menopause one to two years earlier. Early menopause has been seen to lead to heart disease, strokes and osteoporosis; therefore, if a woman can prevent its early onset by stopping smoking, she needs to do so.

## **Smoking's Effect on the Symptoms of Menopause**

Many women suffer from the symptoms of menopause, including hot flashes and difficulty sleeping. Women who smoke will likely experience these symptoms to a greater degree, thus making menopause a more unpleasant and disruptive process.

## **Smoking's Effects after Menopause**

If you are a woman who smokes, you are 35 percent more likely to break your hip after menopause than if you did not smoke. If you are a former smoker, then you have a 15 percent greater risk of hip fracture. The number of years you have smoked will affect the risk of fracture more than the number of cigarettes you tend to smoke. For

every five years of smoking, the risk of hip fracture increases six percent. It has been found that smoking after menopause has a greater effect on fracture risk than smoking before menopause. The good news is that for every five years off smoking, your risk for fracture drops two percent. If you can stay off cigarettes for 15 years, you will have no added risk for fracture.

## **Summary**

Smoking leads to many serious health problems in women, including heart disease, which is the number one killer of women. But smoking also affects a woman's experience of menopause: before, during, and after. Osteoporosis is a potential result of menopause and estrogen reduction, especially in women who are smokers, small-boned, Caucasian, and/or Asian. By avoiding smoking, you can avoid the more serious results of menopause and enjoy your postmenopausal years as a healthier woman. If you are a smoker and would like help in stopping, call 1-866-CALL-MLH for information on smoking cessation programs.

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*(Continued)*

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## **SmokeFREE**

If you are a smoker who is interested in stopping, Main Line Health offers a FREE smoking cessation program, SmokeFREE. This 6-session behavior modification program addresses the physical and psychological addiction to smoking. Numerous FREE classes are scheduled throughout the area. Call 1-866-CALL-MLH for dates, times and locations. Funding provided by the PA Department of Health.

*Smoking leads to many serious health problems in women, including heart disease.*

This article is part of our Menopause and You library, an online program sponsored by Women's Health Source. To view the entire library of articles, please visit [mainlinehealth.org/whs](http://mainlinehealth.org/whs) and click on the "Menopause and You" link. To speak with our nurse counselor, call 1.888.876.8764 or email [whs@mlhs.org](mailto:whs@mlhs.org).

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