

More Reasons to Quit!

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Do you remember the song “Smoke gets in your Eyes” by The Platters? It was from the golden era of Rock-n-Roll and was very popular with its romantic connotations and lyrics. Clearly, however, there is nothing romantic about eye exposure to tobacco smoke. Being in a smoke-filled room or having smoke blown in our faces at the very least causes a minor irritation, but in some cases the results can extend well beyond a simple annoyance.

Researchers indicate that there is a direct correlation between smoking and “Age-related Macular Degeneration” (AMD). This connection is now being widely reported in eye care trade journals, as well as in the general news media. The results of the study imply that 25% of all cases of AMD are linked to smoking. It is important to note that AMD is the leading cause of blindness in Americans age 65 and over.¹

Additionally, toxins associated with smoking may decrease blood flow or cause blood clots in the capillaries within the eye, decreasing the flow of nutrients to the eye necessary for good eye health. Smoking has been linked to the creation of fragmented molecules known as free radicals, which disrupt healthy cells and can lead directly to eye disease. In other studies by researchers at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary and the Biostatistics Laboratory at Harvard Medical School, it was learned that both current and past smokers run twice the risk to develop AMD, compared with individuals who had never smoked.

Smoking has also been identified as potentially causal to other eye health conditions including Cataracts, Glaucoma, Optic Neuritis and to a lesser degree, Graves Ophthalmopathy. Concerning Glaucoma, the toxins created by tobacco smoke tend to restrict blood flow. This constriction of the blood vessels increases the inner eye pressure (intraocular pressure) that can lead to Glaucoma, and can also cause optic nerve damage. Other studies report that Diabetic Retinopathy may also be linked to smoking, although these test results require further research. However, most experts agree that smoking should be avoided for the health of the eyes—as well as for the many other associated health issues smoking engenders.

It is clear that individuals who have never smoked, or have ceased smoking, reduce their risk of contracting serious eye disease. If you, or someone you love currently smokes, it is highly recommended that you quit—and if you don’t smoke, please, for your health and the health of those you live with, don’t start!

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¹ *Investigative Ophthalmology & Visual Science, February 2006, Ivan Suner, M.D.*