

Weekend Doctor

By **DR. THOMAS F. VAIL**

By now, most of us have learned that smoking is very bad for our health. The facts about smoking are downright scary. Smoking has been linked to cancer, heart disease, stroke and lung diseases including emphysema, bronchitis and chronic airway obstruction.

With that said, smoking is the most preventable cause of death.

Each year in the United States, smoking causes one out of every five deaths. This is more than 440,000 deaths a year.

Smoking is also a very costly habit. Each year, diseases caused by smoking result in 96 billion in health care costs. Much of this money is paid by taxpayers through publicly-funded health programs.

If the above is not enough to make you think twice about smoking, here is another fact for you: smoking can lead to poor healing after foot surgery.



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Research has shown that smoking has a negative effect on bone, skin and wound healing. Tobacco smoke has more than 7,000 chemicals and hundreds of these chemicals act like poison during healing.

Nicotine and carbon monoxide are two chemicals in cigarette smoke that decrease healing after surgery. Nicotine narrows blood vessels resulting in decreased blood flow and oxygen.

Adequate blood flow and oxygen is essential for any type of foot surgery because of the many tendons and bones in the feet-more than any other part of the body.

In fact, your podiatrist cannot even perform surgery if vascular testing shows that you do not have good blood flow to your feet.

Nicotine also decreases osteoblast activity. Osteoblasts are the building cells of bones and are critical in bone healing after foot surgery.

Carbon monoxide, like nicotine, also plays a role in limiting oxygen to the tissues. Smoking is also linked to an increased risk for infection after surgery.

Neutrophils are white blood cells that help the body fight off bacteria. Neutrophils kill bacteria by using oxygen.

As you know now, smoking makes it difficult for oxygen to be used by the body. If neutrophils cannot do their job, bacteria are able to get into the operation sites and can cause much damage.

If you are thinking about getting a bunion or hammer toe fixed, you should seriously think about quitting smoking.

Studies have shown that quitting smoking four to six weeks before surgery can improve surgical healing and give you a better outcome.

Sometimes we have no control over life events and if you are in an accident you will not have time to quit smoking before a surgeon operates.

In times like these, you want to have the advantage of having maximum blood flow and oxygen delivery. This just is not possible if you are a smoker.

If you are a diabetic, each cigarette you smoke is even more deadly. Diabetics already have an increased risk of poor healing and decreased blood flow.

Sometimes foot surgery is necessary in diabetics and cigarette smokers are almost guaranteed to have a negative outcome.

Now that you know more facts, it's time to make a healthier life choice. Nobody said quitting smoking was easy, but as the facts show, your life depends on it.

If you are interested in fixing your foot deformities, stop smoking and see your podiatrist.

Vail is with Advanced Footcare Clinic, Findlay. Questions for Blanchard Valley Health System experts may be sent to Weekend Doctor, The Courier, P.O. Box 609, Findlay, OH 45839.