

## Quitting a deadly habit

### *The Health Column*

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Smoking is recognised as the largest single preventable cause of death and disease in Australia. It is associated with an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer, emphysema, bronchitis, asthma, renal disease and eye disease.

In fact, there is a tobacco-related death about every 28 minutes in Australia. A large proportion of these deaths are males (almost 13,000 deaths per year compared with 6,000 for females). In all age groups, except 15-34 years, more deaths were related to use of tobacco than to alcohol or illicit drugs. In addition, a large proportion of these deaths (around 21 every day) are from cancer, one-quarter of which involve working-age Australians.

In 2011-12, the Australian Health Survey reported that approximately 8 million Australian adults aged 18 years and over had smoked at some time in their lives. 3.1 million were smokers, with the vast majority (90%) of these people smoking daily.

In recent years the negative effects of passive smoking have also received considerable attention, demonstrating that the risks to health of smoking affect more than just the smoker.

Passive smoking increases the risk of heart disease, asthma, and some cancers. It may also increase the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), and may predispose children to allergic sensitisation.

During 2007-08, the latest statistics available, 3.5% of people who were not current smokers (aged 15 years and over) and 7.2% of children (aged under 15 years) lived in a household where a daily smoker was reported to have smoked indoors.

The Australian Government's tobacco control strategies, such as mass media public education campaigns, high tobacco taxes, advertising bans and smoke-free environment legislation, have helped with the steady decline in smoking rates over recent decades. Between 1991 and 2010, the proportion of daily smokers aged 14 years and over decreased by almost 40%.



*Photo by Deanna Fischl*

Today, it is estimated that less than 20% of the Australian adult population smokes. Surprisingly many people still smoke despite all the evidence of its harmful and fatal effects.

Medical research made it clear during the 1900s that tobacco use increased the likelihood of many illnesses including heart attacks, strokes, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and many forms of cancer. This is true for all ways in which tobacco is used, including:

- Cigarettes and cigars

- Hand rolling tobacco
- Bidis and kreteks (cigarettes containing tobacco with herbs or spices)
- Pipes and water pipes
- Chewing tobacco
- Snuff

When it comes to smoking, any time is a good time to quit; and it's never too late. Studies have shown that for smokers who quit at age 50 the risk of a tobacco-related death is reduced by about two thirds; and for those who stop before middle age, the risk is little more than for non-smokers.

Helping people quit is a challenge and it has been taken up globally with the World No Tobacco Day on 31 May. This is a day for people, non-government organisations and governments to organise activities to make people aware of the health problems associated with tobacco use and to encourage people to quit. Consider getting involved with these initiatives.

Your local pharmacy, your health destination, can provide a smoking cessation service to motivate and maintain people through the quitting process. For more strategies have a look at the Self Care Fact Cards titled *Smoking*, *Staying a Non-smoker* and *Nicotine Replacement Therapy* available at all Self Care pharmacies. Call 1300 369 772 for the nearest location or visit the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia website at [www.psa.org.au](http://www.psa.org.au), click on Self Care, then "Find a Self Care Pharmacy".