



**KAISER PERMANENTE®**

## Secondhand Smoke

Secondhand smoke is the smoke you breathe that is exhaled by other smokers. This smoke comes from burning cigarettes, pipes, or cigars. Secondhand smoke is also called sidestream, passive, or involuntary smoke.

We have known for decades that smoking increases many health problems and causes or contributes to hundreds of thousands of deaths in the United States every year. In recent years, we have also learned how damaging secondhand smoke can be to others in the smoker's vicinity.

All smoke contains many poisonous chemicals, but secondhand smoke has even more nicotine, carbon monoxide, ammonia, and other chemicals than the filtered smoke inhaled by the smoker. Scientists have found 110 different, irritating chemicals in tobacco smoke.

There are two types of exposure to secondhand smoke. The first is the occasional exposure, as in a restaurant or theater lobby. This smoke is annoying and may cause short-term health problems, such as eye, nose, and throat irritation or headaches. However, if you have other problems such as asthma or heart disease, even brief exposure to secondhand smoke can be dangerous. The other type of exposure to secondhand smoke is regular or heavy exposure. This can happen to people who live or work in buildings where other people regularly smoke. The effects of regular exposure are much worse especially if the area is small or poorly ventilated, or if several people are smoking there.

Several studies have shown that nonsmokers who are exposed for years to heavy secondhand smoke develop respiratory problems. The most common problem is a major decrease of air flow through the lungs as much as if the nonsmoker actually smoked one to ten cigarettes per day.

Other studies have found that nonsmoking women have twice as high a risk of lung cancer if they are married to smokers. Also, nonsmokers exposed to regular, heavy secondhand smoke have greater amounts of carbon monoxide in their blood. This extra carbon monoxide may affect mental ability and normal breathing functions.

Two kinds of nonsmokers suffer the most from secondhand smoke: children from conception to 16 years and adults with respiratory or heart diseases.

Even unborn babies run the risk of health problems, such as decrease in birth weight, increased chance of miscarriage and premature birth, and increase in school problems later in life, if their mothers smoked during pregnancy. Once they're born, infants' lungs are small and still developing; secondhand smoke reduces their ability to take in oxygen. Children of smokers develop more colds, bronchitis, and pneumonia than children of nonsmokers. This can be especially serious for children with asthma. Children with asthma exposed daily to smoke from

ten or more cigarettes lose an average of 20 percent of their lung function by the age of 18.

In addition, adults with diseases such as asthma, emphysema, or chronic bronchitis may develop severe breathing problems from exposure to secondhand smoke. Heart patients—especially those with angina—may have painful angina attacks or suffer decreased circulation of blood to their heart.



For information about quitting smoking, please refer to your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook* or contact the Health Education Department at your local Kaiser Permanente facility. You might also want to listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages on: Developing a Plan for Quitting Smoking; Teens and Smoking; or Why People Smoke. Please check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthphone Directory*.

For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at [www.kaiserpermanente.org/california](http://www.kaiserpermanente.org/california), then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

© 1998, The Permanente Medical Group, Inc.

REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION