I have heard of a few people with lung cancer who have never smoked. If tobacco causes lung cancer, then how does this happen?

There is no doubt that cigarette smoking—inhalation of tobacco smoke—is a cause of lung cancer. It is, however, not the only cause. We need to remember that lung cancer is actually a group of cancers, each derived from different cells found in the lung. People living or working in an environment polluted by the tobacco smoke of others are also at increased risk. So are those living in densely populated urban areas breathing the polluted atmosphere of the city. When one considers a population living in the cleanest of air, some will still get lung cancer. The lowest rates, of course, are found with those breathing the purest air.

Pollution is something we Adventists need to give more attention to. Not only is there the global risk of increasing carbon dioxide levels leading to global warming, but children living close to a freeway are at risk of adverse respiratory effects. A few years ago in California, research indicated that children living in areas of pollution had more slowly growing lungs. A more recent study following up on that information found that the distance from a freeway at which a child lived correlated with pulmonary studies. Children living closer than 500 meters (1,644 feet) to a freeway had poorer pulmonary functions than those living more than 1,500 meters (.93 mile) from a freeway.

This suggests not only pollution in general but traffic pollution specifically has an effect.

Is there any way to prevent a stroke? My father had one, and I worry that I too may have one.
I share the same concerns because my mother (Mrs. Handysides) had a stroke and lived in a handicapped state for 14 years. It is estimated that some 200 to 300 for every 100,000 Americans will have a stroke within the next year. Age is the biggest risk factor, and the longer we live, the greater the risk. I guess we don’t want to stop living, but the risk doubles every decade older we get.

Stroke is caused when blood vessels to the brain either block or burst, and atherosclerosis is a major underlying cause of these problems. About 83 percent of strokes occur when the vessels plug up, and 17 percent when they burst.

Risk factors besides age are high blood pressure, high LDL (the “bad” cholesterol), diabetes, smoking, lack of exercise, and the metabolic syndrome of obesity. Insulin resistance, high blood pressure, increased abdominal girth, and abnormal blood cholesterol all contribute to increased risk.

Another warning sign can be the transient ischemic attack (TIA). This may present as an abrupt but passing neurological event such as weakness or a loss of vision or speech. Many such people have a blocked carotid artery and may need a carotid endarterectomy or other intervention. A person who has had a TIA needs careful evaluation.

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While this column is provided as a service to our readers, Drs. Landless and Handysides unfortunately cannot enter into personal and private communication with our readers. We recommend that you consult with your personal physician on all matters of your health.