Looking Younger, Longer

The Tobacco Connection: Skin, Hair and Teeth

Cigarette Smoke: Beauty and the Beast

More Tobacco Talking Points

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Recently, your HealthWise reporter learned through email connections that Natalia (not her real name, of course) has begun to smoke. Natalia, age 14, lives in South America – where it appears that cigarettes are as popular with teens as here in the U.S.A. That’s bad news for Bolivia.

Can you recall that picture of Churchill, the one with the bulldog expressing? Rumor has it that Karst, his Canadian photographer, had snatched a cigar from his lips moments before he snapped the famous picture.

That’s what we’d like to do for Natalia, and the millions of other teens and pre-teens who place a cigarette between their yielding lips for the first time – or the second or third. Consider some reasons why:

Tobacco tars and toxins cause more than cancer and heart disease. Sure, that’s bad enough – but it’s also a matter of aging; it’s a matter of looking older or younger. It’s skin, hair and teeth.

Tobacco toxins, inhaled into the blood by way of the protesting lungs, cause the skin to age prematurely. Whether on face, or neck, or anywhere, the skin grows thin and loses its youth. The result, feared by ladies with beautiful skin everywhere, is wrinkles. So, at 40, "Milady Beautiful" appears in the office of her favorite dermatologist and pleads for skin rejuvenation. Not in vain usually – yet epidermal scientists, for all their skills, have only limited access to the pool of youth.

Then consider a woman’s crowning beauty – for that matter, a man’s as well. Listen to this: It is reported that smokers are four times more likely to develop gray hair early on than non-smokers are. Time to brush up on your habits, you pack-a-day folks! There’s more on hair, this time almost exclusively for men. Male smokers double their risk of early hair loss over their non-smoking brothers. So, next time you are tempted to buy into one of those radio commercials grandly promising new hair growth, decide to pay for the plan with dollars saved on cigarettes.

No doubt, your friendly dentist will attest to this "final" smoker’s gnashing of the teeth: Smoke a pack or so a day, and lose two teeth every decade. That’s two extra, along with the almost inevitable losses with aging.

Here’s why it hurts. This is why it is so vital that we get the grim news out to our kids – a national survey of students in grades 6, 7, and 8 revealed that almost 13 percent of them were already tobacco freaks. It goes up exponentially from there, so acutely that one expert (Michael Erksin,
director of the Office on Smoking and Health, Centers for Disease Control) recently declared that "5 million children under the age of 18 alive today in the United States will die prematurely as a result of addiction to cigarette smoking."

Kids, it’s cool not to smoke, so don’t ever take that first puff. Or the second. Your skin, hair and teeth will forever be grateful.

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