

[IMAGE]

Perilous Vices

Even Worse Than We Could Have Imagined

Cigarettes and alcohol: two of the most perilous vices known to humankind, and two of the most heavily indulged, despite what ample research and experience prove. In 2006, 50.8 percent of Americans ages 12 and older reported using alcohol in the past month, according to the U.S. Health Services and Resources Administration; and one in five Americans smokes cigarettes as of 2008, asserts a Gallup Poll. Public awareness campaigners everywhere are cringing at these staggering figures, which are lower than in years past, but still far from ideal considering the horrific health consequences.

The major health risks associated with cigarette smoking and alcohol use are well-known: cancers of the lungs, throat and mouth for the former; liver disease for the latter. Those are risks to the individual; what makes these two vices more troubling is that they can impact *other* people via secondhand smoke and accidents caused by drivers under the influence, respectively. And believe it or not, it gets even worse: Cigarette smoking and alcohol have been linked to a variety of other unpleasant health outcomes you may not be aware of. After reading this list, you shouldn't be smoking (ever) and you shouldn't be drinking except in occasional fashion:

Alcohol and cigarettes - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark *Alcohol and Cancer Risk*: Even low to moderate alcohol consumption significantly increases women's risk for cancer (overall and at specific sites), according to a study published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*. Middle-aged women who drank one or more drinks daily (of any type) were at increased risk for developing breast, liver and rectal cancer. Risk increased according to number of drinks consumed.

Smoking and Rheumatoid Arthritis: A study in the October 2008 issue of *Arthritis & Rheumatism* suggests people with a genetic predisposition to develop rheumatoid arthritis (RA) are significantly more likely to do so if they also smoke, but smoking itself raises the risk slightly, even for people who are not genetically inclined to RA.

Alcohol and Drug Interactions: When it comes to alcohol and medication, the two just don't mix well at all. Particular medications of concern, according to the Mayo Clinic, include anti-seizure medications,

antidepressants, anticoagulants, antihistamines, antibiotics - apparently just about any "anti" drug you can think of. Sleeping pills and aspirin are also on the list, the latter of which increases the risk of gastrointestinal bleeding if taken with alcohol.

Smoking and Snoring: A study involving more than 15,000 participants suggests smoking - or even living with a smoker - increases your risk of snoring. The study, published in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* last October, found that snoring affected nearly one in four current smokers compared with one in five former smokers and only 14 percent of nonsmokers. Even nonsmokers were impacted if they lived with a smoker; 20 percent snored, 7 percent more than those who were not exposed to secondhand smoke.

Alcohol, Smoking Both Linked to Alzheimer's: While some evidence suggests moderate alcohol reduces the risk of Alzheimer's disease (AD), heavy drinking and smoking independently increase the risk of early onset of the disease. According to research presented last year at the American Academy of Neurology's 60th Annual Meeting, people who drank two or more drinks per day developed AD 4.8 years earlier than nondrinkers, while heavy smokers (two or more packs daily) developed AD 2.3 years earlier than nonsmokers. Heavy drinking, heavy smoking *and* having a genetic tendency to develop AD was the worst: That combination accelerated onset of the disease by 8.5 years.

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