

[IMAGE]

## Long-Term Smoking Linked to Arthritis

Unless you've just moved here from another planet, you're well aware of the profound dangers associated with consistent tobacco use. People who smoke run the risk of developing chronic conditions such as lung cancer, emphysema and heart disease, not to mention rheumatoid arthritis (RA).

OK, let's mention RA after all. Rheumatoid arthritis, the most common form of arthritis in the United States, is a disabling disease characterized by joint swelling, pain and stiffness. According to a recent study, long-term cigarette smoking may contribute to the development of RA.

As part of the Womens' Health Cohort Study, 377,481 female health care professionals completed questionnaires that asked about health habits, cigarette smoking history, and medical history (including a diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis). Results showed that women who smoked for many years faced a 24-39% increase in the risk of developing RA compared with nonsmokers, even after accounting for other potential risk factors, such as age, race, pregnancy history, menopausal status and hormone use.

Smoking is a choice, but it's easy to see why it's probably not a very good choice, especially considering some of the horrible diseases long-term smoking may cause. If you choose to smoke, be aware of the risks to yourself and your children. If you'd like to quit, your doctor can help determine the method that will work best for you. And if you don't smoke, keep up the good work! Your body will thank you for it.

### *Reference:*

Karlson E, Min-Lee I, Cook N, et al. A retrospective cohort study of cigarette smoking and risk of rheumatoid arthritis in female health professionals. *Arthritis & Rheumatism*, May 1999: Vol. 42, No. 5, pp910-917.

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