Key Messages for Patients and the Public

Overview

The prevalence of heart disease and cardiovascular disease increased among people in all age groups in Canada between 1994 and 2005. 1 Risk factors for these conditions include smoking, high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. Smoking is also an important risk factor for high blood pressure and diabetes. Younger Canadians show increasing risks for cardiovascular disease, but stopping smoking can have immediate health benefits for Canadians of all ages.

The Link between Smoking and Cardiovascular Disease and Diabetes

- Smoking is an important risk factor for high blood pressure and diabetes, and is an independent risk factor for death from heart disease. 2-4 Smoking or exposure to smoke increases the work performed by the heart because smoking increase the heart rate while reducing the oxygen carried by the blood, and also narrowing the blood vessels that supply blood to the heart muscle. 5
- People who currently smoke are at greater risk of developing cardiovascular diseases than those who formerly smoked. The risks increase with the frequency and number of cigarettes smoked. 6
- Smoking increases the risk of developing diabetes. Smoking impairs glucose tolerance (a pre-diabetic state) and leads to higher levels of triglycerides and lower levels of high density-lipoprotein-cholesterol (sometimes called “good” cholesterol) in the blood. 7-9
- Women with diabetes are at a much greater risk for coronary heart disease and death than women without diabetes. Smoking increases these risks significantly. 10 However, research shows that the risk for coronary heart disease for women with diabetes who stopped smoking for more than 10 years is similar to the risk for women with diabetes who never smoked. 10
- An analysis of 32 research studies showed that people who smoke have twice the risk of having a stroke compared to people who do not smoke. 11 Quitting smoking is one of the most effective ways that people who smoke and have coronary artery disease can reduce the risk of dying from the disease. 12

Helpful Resources

- Canadian Cancer Society. Smokers Helpline. Free telephone, web-based or text service offering tips, tools and support to help with quitting smoking. http://www.smokershelpline.ca/ (1 877 513-5333)
References


