

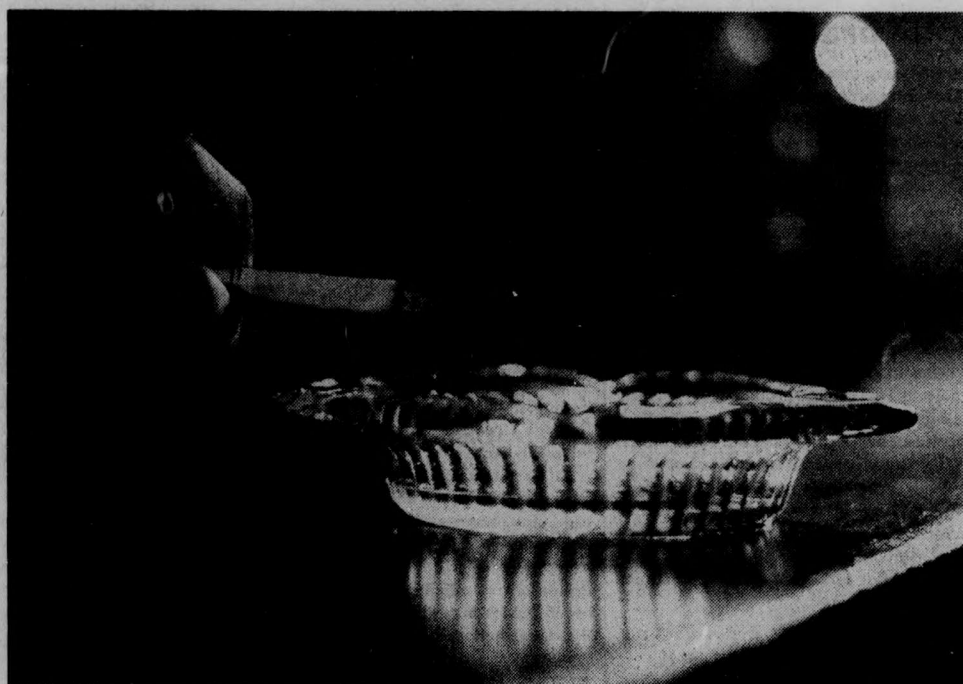
# Behind the smokescreen: secrets of cigarettes

## Why Smoke?

**SONYA BUYTING**  
THE BRUNSWICKIAN

Smoking was once thought to be a fashion statement and a health benefit. We now know that the latter is not true, and the former could be argued. Picture this you have tobacco (and other chemicals) wrapped up in paper with a filter at one end. This stick is lit and the tobacco is burning, making smoke. You put the filter end of the stick in your mouth and inhale. In the process of inhalation, the smoke goes through your mouth causing your teeth to turn yellow and your breath to stink. The smoke proceeds into your lungs. You are welcoming foreign chemicals, including carcinogens into your body. This could cause anything from heart problems to lung cancer then once you have got all the goodies out of the smoke, you exhale the leftovers out of your mouth or nose. Aaaahhh, you get a calming, euphoric feeling, and you looked cool in the process. You will have the smell of cigarettes on your clothes to demonstrate to everyone that you have taken control of your life. You have chosen to smell and taste like an ashtray, look like a dragon, and to induce possible health problems. But it is your choice—it is a freedom (for anyone over 19 years of age).

Most people heard how bad smoking was when they started. Why do people ever start?  
 "My friends used to smoke so I tried it and I liked it. I got addicted." - Henry, 20.  
 "I was probably curious and influenced by others—I liked it the first time." - Yvonne, 15.  
 "I started because everyone else was smoking." - Andrea, 23.  
 These people are cigarette smokers. But do they enjoy it?  
 "I like to smoke for social reasons, and I like the way it feels going down." - Henry, 20.  
 "I enjoy having a cigarette with a coffee or a beer. I don't enjoy having a cigarette out in the cold." - Andrea, 23.  
 Is smoking a habit you want to quit? Why or why not?  
 "I'm trying to quit now. It's unhealthy...and it stinks." - Henry, 20.  
 "I know I'm addicted. I do want to quit because of my health. I don't want to for social reasons. But it's hard, I've tried to quit before and it doesn't work." - Andrea, 23.  
 "It has become a habit, but I don't think I'm addicted." - Yvonne, 15.  
 This is Canada we live in, therefore you are free to smoke if you are over the age of 19. Think about it carefully, but it is your decision.



FILE PHOTO (MIKE DEAN)

## Smoking may increase resistance to Parkinson's disease

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There is a 40% decrease in the level of monoamineoxidase B (MAOB) in the brains of smokers relative to non-smokers and former smokers.

MAOB is an enzyme which is responsible for the metabolic breakdown of dopamine, a neurotransmitter involved in emotional behavior.

Dopamine has been a factor in the addiction of almost all drugs of abuse; including cocaine, amphetamines, heroin, alcohol, and nicotine. Since dopamine levels are significantly altered by MAOB inhibition (due to smoking), individuals who smoke are much more vulnerable to addiction.

The lower levels of MAOB in smokers results in increased availability of dopamine. The increase in this neurotransmitter can also be associated with reduced risk for smokers to develop Parkinson's disease. The lack of dopamine causes the shaking and wild movements associated with this disease.

So what is the result? Cigarette smoking may make you resistant to Parkinson's disease, but it is also involved in the development of addiction.

### Did you know?

Studies indicate that long-term, heavy smokers have more than double the normal risk of getting age-related macular degeneration (AMD). The major cause of vision loss in people age 65 and older, AMD is a disorder in which the area of the retina that captures images in the center of the visual field breaks down. As of yet, AMD cannot be effectively treated. But (take note!), scientists have zeroed in on a method of reducing the risk of contracting this disorder: DON'T SMOKE!!  
*Science News 150:231 (1996)*

## Secondhand Smoke

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Almost everyone is exposed to cigarette smoke everyday. Trying to avoid second-hand smoke is a difficult task. American researchers found that approximately 88% of non-smokers have detectable levels of cotinine, a breakdown product of nicotine, in their blood. Of these non-smokers, less than 50% of these exposed people live with or work with smokers. This is a growing concern. Innocent bi-standers are constantly suffering from breathing in other

people's smoke. There is an estimated 3000 people in the United States that die each year from second-hand smoke. Also, chickens exposed to tobacco smoke were found to have developed fatty plaques in their arteries. These fatty plaques are similar to those which develop in humans leading to hardening of the arteries. From cotinine levels alone, it is not possible to say exactly what ill-effects people might suffer from second-hand smoke. It does show that most people, smokers or non-smokers, breath in some cigarette smoke everyday.

## Seeing Pink = Positive Action

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A test was developed to detect the levels of nicotine in urine. This simple test, developed by Graham Cope at the University of Birmingham, helped pregnant women cut down or cigarette smoking.

Nicotine and its breakdown products react with test chemicals such as thiobarbituric acid to produce a pink colour. The more tobacco one has consumed, the pinker the results will be. These results are then compared to a standard colorimeter to quantify the amount of tobacco consumed.

One-thousand pregnant women were used for a pilot study in Birmingham. They were all tested for tobacco consumption on their first visit

and then later in their pregnancy. Only half of these women were shown their test results while the other half were used as a control. Just over a 100 of the women shown their results were smokers. Most of these women were found to have reduced their tobacco consumption, and 20% of them were able to actually quit smoking.

In the control group only 7% of the smokers managed to break the habit and a few cut down their consumption. Approximately 45% of these women increased the amount they smoked.

There were major differences in final results between the test and control group. This could be due to the fact that the women in the test group were made more aware of their dangerous habit, and took action.

## Dangerous facts for pregnant smokers

*Human fetuses are also exposed to significant levels of nicotine and that there is a five-fold increase in the incidence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome among infants born to smoking mothers.*  
*Brain Res Dev Brain Res 84: 46-54(1995)*

*A new York City case-control study showed that cigarette smoking during pregnancy was associated positively with chromosomally normal spontaneous abortion.*  
*Am. J. Epidemiol 141:417-427 (1995)*



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