

Orthopaedic Connection

End of Smoking and Bones Mini Course

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

As a rule I don't like writing about subjects that take three weeks. I like to cover the topic succinctly in one week if it's possible. In three weeks you tend to lose people. Nevertheless, there are exceptions and this is one.

Cigarette smoking affects many other areas of body physiology in addition to bones and bone healing. I deal with these problems in my work on an almost daily basis.

Soft Tissue Healing

Cigarette smoke alters the normal process of healing of tissues (besides bones). It does this by negatively affecting several kinds of healing cells and protein growth factors that are essential to healing.

Wounds that I treat at the Wound Treatment Center are very slow to heal in smokers. Smokers get more pressure sores and wound infections which compound the problem.

Tendons and Ligaments

Several studies have demonstrated that cigarette smoking is a risk factor for very slow healing in tendon and ligament injuries. This affects all of the various tendon and ligament injuries I see, but I think it is most obvious in shoulder rotator cuff injuries that I repair.

Not only are tendons and ligaments slower to heal, but to get even more basic there is a much higher incidence of tendons and ligaments rupturing spontaneously or with minimal injury compared with nonsmokers.

Back Pain

Of course you don't have to smoke to have a bad back.

But smokers have a much higher rate of back pain and degenerative disc disease. In other words smokers are in double jeopardy regarding back problems. It is way too complicated to get into the whys of this. Please take my word for it.

Arthritis

To be fair cigarette smoking gets off a little bit easier with osteoarthritis. It does affect the tissues in and around the joints so it must have some role, but it isn't as clear as in bone healing, tendons, ligaments and wounds.

However, in rheumatoid arthritis it does adversely affect the medications used to treat RA.

Healing After Surgery

The most common complications associated with cigarette smoking after surgery are:

- Problems healing the surgical wound
- Increased incidence of infection
- Cardiopulmonary complications

Since I do a lot of elective surgery and take care of many patients who are injured and need surgery, cigarette smoking presents many problems to me as an Orthopaedic Surgeon.

I am realistic enough to know that cigarette smoking is not going to disappear. As long as you and I are around, cigarette smoking will continue to present problems. Perhaps in time the number of patients who smoke will decrease.

The reason for the mini course on Orthopaedic Surgery and Cigarette Smoking is to make smokers and nonsmokers aware of the multiple medical problems that smoking causes.

Hmm, I wonder if we could get all of this on a pack of Camels after SURGEON GENERALS WARNING:

Probably not! The printing would have to be really tiny!!

See you next week.

Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website.

I sincerely appreciate all of you loyal readers and patients present and future and welcome all newcomers!

Besides what you read today there is a huge treasure trove of Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal information at www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It contains the Website Library, Your Orthopaedic Connection and complete archive of every GCH article I have written.

I specialize in you. Be well.

Dr. Haverbush