

Tobacco and Sex - What?

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Tobacco use is well-known to cause health problems. We all know about the increase risk of lung cancer, heart disease and strokes. Some of us are aware of other cancer risks including kidney and bladder cancer. There is even a connection between tobacco use and cervical cancer, especially in women who are on birth control pills. Nevertheless, millions of men and women continue to use tobacco.

Is there any message or any concern that can reach the last holdouts who continue to smoke? I sure hope so. So now I am playing the SEX card!

Before we get right down to how tobacco can ruin even the best lover's chance of success, let's learn about what is in tobacco that can cause problems.

Tobacco products can contain up to 4000 chemicals, 200 of which are deadly and 60 of which can cause cancer. The most dangerous and powerful is nicotine; the substance that makes tobacco products addictive and causes heart problems and vascular (blood vessel) problems. Tobacco products also have ammonia, cyanide, arsenic and thousands of other poisons. So whether we are talking about first hand smoke, second hand smoke or chewing tobacco, there is no good tobacco!

Most all of the studies that deal with sexual responsiveness have been done on men. Perhaps for two reasons: men still control the majority of study funding and it is much easier to measure a male's sexual prowess that it is to measure a females (real and not feigned) sexual response! So let's look at the men then we'll talk about what I have observed in women.

In the past 30 years, studies have been appearing that address use of tobacco and impotence. OK, ladies, let's define impotence:

Inability to achieve or maintain erection of the penis; hence, inability to participate fully in sexual intercourse. Erectile impotence (failure to achieve erection) may have either physical causes (e.g., alcoholism, endocrine disease) or psychological ones (e.g., anxiety, hostility toward the partner). Ejaculatory impotence (inability to reach orgasm, sometimes with an erection maintained for a long time) nearly always has an emotional cause.

For the purpose of this article, we are going to address erectile impotence. Let's be very clear. Though we usually think about the penis as the sexual erectile tissue, let's add that the clitoris "erects" as do nipples, male and female. A good blood supply produces engorged and erect tissue; with erection comes heightened sensitivity and pleasure. Simply put, the better the blood supply, the greater the potential pleasure!

Did you notice that the definition of impotence does not mention tobacco use? We know that an immediate effect of tobacco use, just after a cigarette or a "chew", is constriction of blood vessels. This constriction does limit the blood flow into the penis (or in our case, the clitoris). Long term use of tobacco damages the vessels causing atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries); the hardening of the arteries does not allow the vessels to fill properly with blood. This can lead to a weak erection or one that can't be sustained. And when I am talking about erection, take your choice; it applies to the penis or the clitoris or the nipples.

Now, let's "get medical" and look at some studies.

The Link between Tobacco and Impotence:

Ladies, remember, though these studies were all about men, I am talking to you, too!

McVary et al.^[1] published a comprehensive review in 2001 that examined clinical and scientific studies. The investigators found evidence that impotence can be caused directly by smoking-induced reductions in a substance known as nitric oxide. This directly prevents/limits the relaxation of the arteries; an artery must be "relaxed" to fill with blood and cause an erection. And of course, long term use of nicotine causes atherosclerosis; a hardened artery cannot relax and fill with blood.

How likely is it that tobacco is taking the wind out of his sexual sail? The review by McVary, et al.^[1] indicated that smoking may increase the risk of moderate or complete impotence by two times that of nonsmokers and that smoking cessation may decrease the risk of impotence. Other studies find the same risk. Tobacco users are twice as likely to have an unsuccessful sexual voyage. And how many cigarettes a day can take the wind out of his sail? Even 10 cigarettes a day, over the years, can sink the ship.

Recently, a U.S. study of 1329 men (smokers and nonsmokers) showed that 15% reported suffering from impotence.^[7] One of the questions the authors wanted to look at was whether or not longer tobacco use increased the likelihood of impotence. Logic and the study tell us the same thing. Those men who had

smoked the equivalent of a pack a day for 29 years had much more difficulty than those who had used a pack a day for 12.6 years. Interestingly, when the authors looked more carefully, by age, from current smokers and from men who formerly or never smoked, smokers in their 40s had the greatest risk of suffering from impotence.

Erectile Dysfunction (ED) Drugs to the Rescue?

NO! Unfortunately, not only does smoking appear to increase the risk of impotence; it also predicts a poor response to popular prescription drugs, including “the blue pill”. The researchers, Park, et al., found that current smoking was significantly associated with the failure of sildenafil (Viagra) and similar drugs in men over the age of 60 years. Why? Because these drugs (phosphodiesterase inhibitors) work by enhancing the nitric oxide-mediated vascular responses that cause erections; these responses are reduced in smokers.

Will it Help to Stop Tobacco?

Some studies suggest that men who are former smokers are still more likely to have ED than nonsmokers. The study results are mixed. Some say that it will not help due to the long term damage. Others studies suggest that smoking cessation in young adulthood (versus later in life) may be necessary to reduce the risk of ED.

Yet another study looked at men 32 to 62 years old. Simply put, the erections they experienced while they were asleep were much better if they avoided nicotine for 24 hours and even better after a month of nicotine avoidance. And these fellows had smoked a pack a cigarettes daily for 30 years.

The final study we will look at, Pourmand,et al., clearly suggests that men, 30 to 60 years old who requested nicotine replacement therapy to help them stop smoking and who also complained of ED starting at least five years after starting to smoke showed significant erectile improvement once they had stopped nicotine. The men who continued to smoke experienced worsening dysfunction.

In addition to potentially benefiting the health and erectile status of men with ED, smoking cessation may also affect their treatment for ED. Park et al.^[13] suggested that stopping or reducing the consumption of cigarettes may ensure a better response to treatments with medicine in the phosphodiesterase inhibitors family, such as Viagra, Cialis and Levitra.

Tobacco Education and Advertising Regarding Impotence

Two U.S. states, California and Hawaii have undertaken campaigns to increase the public's knowledge of the detrimental effects of tobacco on erectile function in an attempt to reduce smoking. In the late 1990s, California Department of Health Services introduced a one-year marketing campaign targeting the link between smoking and impotence. Newspaper headlines read "The Marlboro Man needs Viagra" and "What Viagra may give, tobacco taketh away." Hawaii followed suit with the "limp" television campaign geared toward 18 to 24-yearold men. These campaigns were not the first to target impotence as a reason to stop smoking, but they were the most impressive. There is no specific information regarding whether or not these campaigns were successful, but a 2006 news release from the California Department of Health Services indicates that smoking rates in California have continued to decline since 1996 and are currently at an all-time low of 14%, 25% less than the rest of the nation.

Does the Threat of Impotence Motivate Tobacco Cessation?

Many small studies have been performed to answer this question. In each study, the men were twice as likely to stop tobacco if they were aware of the sexual consequences of tobacco use. Based on this, we can assume that guys are more worried about their "member" performance than about the risk of lung cancer. And remember ladies, when I talk to you about sex, if you are still smoking or getting second hand smoke, it is a tough battle we are fighting...if you ever want to get back to the frisky kitten you used to be, you need to make a choice between TOBACCO OR YOUR PASSION. What's it to be? And yes, I am looking into sildenafil (Viagra) and several other substances for women! It's not too late to quit!