



## Tobacco - The Facts

- Tobacco was introduced to Europe from the New World at the end of the fifteenth century. Smoking spread rapidly and was long regarded as having medicinal value. It was not until the 20th century, however, that smoking became a mass habit and not until after the Second World War that the dangers of smoking were firmly established.
- About **13 million adults** in the UK smoke cigarettes - 29% of men and 25% of women. In 1974, 51% of men and 41% of women smoked cigarettes - nearly half the adult population of the UK. Now just over one-quarter smoke, but the decline in recent years has been heavily concentrated in older age groups: i.e., almost as many young people are taking up smoking but more established smokers are quitting.
- Adult smoking rates vary between different parts of the country. In East Anglia, 26% of people smoke, in the North West, 30%, (35% in Manchester!!!). In Scotland, 30% of the population smokes, in Wales 25% and in Northern Ireland prevalence is 29%.
- Smoking is highest among those aged 20-34: 35% of men and women in this age group smoke. Among older age groups prevalence gradually declines with the lowest smoking rate among people aged 60 and over: 16% smoke in this age group.
- More than 80% of smokers take up the habit as teenagers.
- In the United Kingdom about 450 children start smoking every day.
- Almost a quarter of Britain's 15 year-olds – 21% of boys and 26% of girls - are regular smokers - despite the fact that it is illegal to sell cigarettes to children aged under 16.
- Men and women in the unskilled manual socio-economic group are more likely to smoke than people in the professional group. 15% of men and 13% of women in the professional group smoke compared with 39% of men and 34% of women in the unskilled manual group.
- People do give up - **20% of women and 27% of men are ex-smokers**. Surveys show that about 70% of current smokers would like to give up altogether.
- Tobacco is the only legally available consumer product which kills people when it is used entirely as intended.
- Every year, around 120,000 smokers in the UK die as a result of their habit.
- Smoking kills around six times more people in the UK than, road traffic accidents, other accidents, poisoning and overdose, murder and manslaughter suicide, and HIV infection **all put together**
- About half of all regular cigarette smokers will eventually be killed by their habit.
- Smoking causes thirty per cent of all cancer deaths (including at least 80% of lung cancer deaths), 17% of all heart disease deaths and at least 80% of deaths from bronchitis and emphysema.
- Polls show that people underestimate the health risks of smoking and the effects of passive smoking.
- It is estimated that several hundred cases of lung cancer and several thousand cases of heart disease in non-smokers in the UK are caused by passive smoking - breathing other people's tobacco smoke.
- The UK government earned £9,616 million in revenue from tobacco duty and VAT in 2000.
- It is estimated that the tobacco industry currently spends around £57 million every year on advertising and promoting tobacco in the UK. A law to ban tobacco advertising and sponsorship is likely to be introduced during 2002.
- In December 1998, The Government published a White Paper on tobacco in which a commitment was made to spend £100 million over three years on health campaigns against tobacco use.
- ASH was established in 1971 by the Royal College of Physicians following the failure of the Government to act on the College's request for effective laws to reduce tobacco use.



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Tobacco smoke contains over 4,000 chemical compounds, which are present either as gases or as tiny particles. These include:

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| <b>Nicotine</b>        | Is a chemical that is extremely addictive. It affects the nervous system accelerating heart rate and raising blood pressure. In large amounts nicotine is poisonous.  |
| <b>Tar</b>             | Tar is brown in appearance and holds many of the 4,000 chemicals. Tar is slowly absorbed by the body and takes in chemicals such as those below into the body.  |
| <b>4,000 Chemicals</b> | Formaldehyde (embalming dead animals), arsenic (ant poison), cyanide (human execution in the USA), Methanol (rocket fuel), lead (car fumes)   |
| <b>Carbon Monoxide</b> | Carbon monoxide is a gas that is taken into the body more readily than oxygen. This gas is very poisonous and effects the arteries of smokers meaning that they are more likely to suffer from circulatory problems including strokes and possible heart attacks. |

***For further Tobacco information visit the Ash website at:-***  
[www.ash.org.uk](http://www.ash.org.uk)