

Introduction

Did I read that correctly? A *Smoker's* Guide to Health and Fitness? Is this a joke? Are you a real doctor?

Yes, yes, no, and yes.

When people think of cigarette smokers, health and fitness don't generally come to mind. The idea of smokers caring about their health seems laughable. Over the past few decades medical research has linked smoking to numerous life-shortening diseases, including heart disease, various respiratory illnesses and many cancers. Every pack of cigarettes supplies a warning for what might happen to you if you smoke. How could any smokers claim to care about their health while still smoking?

There are people who smoke because they enjoy it and make a conscious decision to continue despite knowing the risks to their health. Society often tends to look down on them. "How can you smoke?" "Don't you know how bad smoking is for you?" Non-smokers can't understand the pleasures that a smoker may get from that cigarette. They also don't understand what a struggle it can be to quit.

Most smokers start during their teens, often due to peer pressure from their friends. Many of them thoroughly enjoy smoking, at least initially. I myself am an ex-smoker, and I enjoyed cigarettes immensely. There are also a number of smokers who think that cigarette smoking reduces their anxiety, lifts them up from a low mood and helps them cope better with stress. However, as time goes on, many smokers don't really enjoy it anymore. They feel sick, out of shape, and may have a chronic hacking cough. They might face the anger and disappointment of their spouses, children, or friends. Their teeth become yellow and their clothes smell. In some places, being a smoker makes you a social pariah. And on top of all of that their risk for disease and bodily dysfunction goes through the roof. Many smokers attempt to quit smoking, often multiple times. Sometimes they're successful for long periods of time, but then resume their habit. Though a small number of smokers only smoke "socially," that is, when going out or on special occasions, unfortunately they represent a minority of all smokers (roughly 20-30%).

As a practicing family physician, I've noticed that most of my patients who are current cigarette smokers actually do care about their health. They often try to make health-conscious choices in their lives and are concerned about their overall physical and mental health, even if they're not at the moment trying to actively quit smoking. This might seem odd to some of you, but consider people who are overweight, don't exercise much or at all, and eat an unhealthy diet, yet religiously go to the doctor for check-ups, do blood tests to check sugar and cholesterol levels, and take medications when needed. If they care about their health, why the heck do they eat a poor diet or avoid exercising? Human beings are complex and full of contradictions; they might be health-conscious in some areas of their lives, and neglectful of themselves in others.

In addition to current smokers who aren't actively trying to quit, there are also many who are, and their struggle to break the habit is often driven by health concerns or health

scares, such as the onset of a disease or frightening symptoms (e.g. coughing up bloody phlegm); they might also be concerned about the consequences their smoking will have on other people, such as their children. Attempts to quit are primarily motivated by health-consciousness and fear of premature morbidity and mortality.

In my work as a physician I've also noticed that many former smokers, people who successfully stopped smoking cigarettes, don't become complacent about their health once they've kicked the habit. They often care tremendously about their health and are rightly worried about potential lingering effects from their years of smoking. *Both current and former smokers have unique health and fitness needs that must be addressed for them to attain optimal health, no matter what point in their life they're at –if they're still smoking, trying to quit, or haven't smoked in years.*

This is what *A Smoker's Guide to Health and Fitness* is all about. This book promotes the best ways for current and former smokers to attain the best health possible for them and addresses their unique health and fitness needs, **which are ignored by practically all other health and fitness books and programs**. Given the fact that many millions of people in this country (as well as worldwide) smoke, or used to smoke, this book is long overdue. It's for current and former smokers at all different stages in their life, different levels of health and fitness, and different smoking histories. Non-smokers could also benefit from the book, so it might be a good idea to share it with family members, friends and colleagues who don't smoke, particularly if they're interested in eating better, exercising more, and having an overall healthier life.

My personal opinion is that as long as no one is at the receiving end of secondhand smoke (such as children), then people should have the choice to do as they please. After all, do we go up to sedentary people and yell at them for not exercising? Do we chew out people for eating fast food and drinking soda? All of these are harmful to one's health. How you live your life is ultimately your choice. This book will help you with the choices you make about your health by presenting you with information and advice, so that your decisions can be well-informed. My goal is to help you make the right choices in regards to your smoking (and quitting smoking), your medical care, diet, and exercise regimens. I'm not going to scold you and wag my finger at you, just lay out the facts. I will also not reduce you to your cigarette habit (or former habit). I aim to tackle your overall fitness and health: you as a whole person.

This book consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 will discuss in detail the health risks associated with smoking. Chapter 2 discusses the various means available to help you quit should you desire to do so. Chapter 3 discusses what types of medical tests you need to help detect potential health problems. Chapter 4 discusses exercise and provides sample fitness routines that you can follow at home without the need for any exercise equipment. Chapter 5 discusses diet, in particular the types of diets and foods that can help to prevent smoking related illnesses, and on the flipside, diets and foods to avoid. Chapter 6 delves into supplement use; in particular, which supplements have benefit in the prevention of smoking-related chronic diseases, which supplements can potentially make things worse, and which are simply a waste of money. Chapter 7 will address mental health and smoking.

Overall the book will primarily deal with cigarette smoking as opposed to other forms of tobacco use. Most tobacco research has been conducted on cigarette smoking, as it's particularly prevalent and harmful. However, other kinds of tobacco products will be mentioned if there's relevant research on them.

My co-author, Hila Katz, and I tried as best as we could to write the book in a clear, concise manner such that it is truly practical without being encyclopedic in nature. The book is based not only on my medical knowledge but also on the current research to date. We will be happy to answer questions and discuss the material via email or through the book's website (<http://www.smokersfitness.com/>).

Finally, and most importantly, although following this guide might help to mitigate the risks of smoking related illnesses and get you into better shape and health, it is no replacement for smoking cessation. Quitting smoking is most likely the single best thing that you can do for your health.

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