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## Secondhand Smoke

The dangers of smoking have been known for years. But more recently, experts have warned that breathing in someone else's secondhand smoke is also a health risk.

Secondhand smoke — a combination of the smoke coming from the burning end of a cigarette or cigar (sidestream smoke) and the smoke that is exhaled by a smoker (mainstream smoke) — is almost as dangerous as smoking.

### About Secondhand Smoke

Smokers might not intend to put the people around them in danger, but they are. Secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemical compounds — from arsenic and ammonia to hydrogen cyanide — many of which increase the risk of cancer and heart disease.

Breathing in secondhand smoke can significantly increase someone's risk for:

- respiratory infections (like bronchitis and pneumonia)
- asthma (secondhand smoke is a risk factor for the development of asthma and can trigger attacks in those who already have it)
- coughing, sore throats, sniffing, and sneezing
- cancer
- heart disease

So secondhand smoke won't just affect kids in the future. It can cause problems now, like hurting sports performance or the ability to be physically active.

### Protecting Your Kids

Even now that fewer people smoke, chances are that someone in your family or someone you know still smokes. But it's never healthy to breathe in tobacco smoke — even occasional or short-term exposure can take a toll on the body.

If you smoke, try to quit. If you have other smokers in the family, offer support and encouragement to help them kick the habit. Quitting isn't easy because smoking is highly addictive. But there are many support groups and tobacco-free programs available to help people stop.

If you can't make your family completely smoke-free, you can still help protect your kids (and yourself!) from secondhand smoke by enforcing these two practical habits:

1. **Never allow smoking inside the house:** Smoking should be done outside, away from other people, especially kids and anyone who's pregnant. Smoke lingers in the air hours after cigarettes are put out. So even if someone smokes in a room alone, other people will eventually inhale that smoke, too.

Because smoke sticks to people and their clothing, when smokers come back inside, they should wash their hands and change their clothes, especially before holding or hugging children.

2. **Never smoke in a car with other people:** Even exhaling out the window does little, if anything, to reduce smoke exposure.

Nonsmoking adults can more easily walk away from other people's smoke at home, work, restaurants, even friends' and family members' houses. But sometimes kids need help from their parents to lead smoke-free lives. So don't be afraid to speak up if someone is smoking near your child. Politely ask the person not to, but be prepared to move away from the smoker if the situation becomes uncomfortable.

Taking a stand on secondhand smoke will help keep your whole family much healthier. It also might inspire others in your life to kick their unhealthy habit.

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