



# THE LAST DAYS OF THE CIGARETTE

Stubbing out takes a considerable amount of willpower and dedication, but with the right mix of advice and treatment, you can say goodbye to cigarettes for life.



BY MICHELLE BONG WITH CONSULTATION FROM GRACE HO,  
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**W**orld No Tobacco Day is observed around the world on 31 May each year, and 2010 is no exception. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has decided that this year, the focus falls on drawing particular attention to the harmful effects of tobacco marketing towards women and girls.

This is in line with the rising prevalence of tobacco use among females. According to WHO, data from 151 countries shows that about seven per cent of adolescent girls smoke cigarettes as opposed to 12 per cent of adolescent boys. In some countries, almost as many girls smoke as boys.

In Singapore, a bigger percentage of men (five to six times more) compared to women smoke. Smoking is the eighth killer in Singapore, and according to recent statistics from the Ministry of Health, there are about 360,000 smokers out there, 14 per cent of which are Malays.

Smoking may still be seen by some as a “cool” thing to do. But in reality, it exposes a person to harmful substances and increases their risk of developing smoking-related diseases (see box stories). Smokers may also develop complications such as heart disease, diabetes, gall bladder problems and pneumonia.

Explains Grace Ho, a pharmacist at Tan Tock Seng Hospital’s Outpatient Pharmacy: “Nicotine causes a rise in blood pressure, making blood clot more easily while carbon monoxide causes a drop in the blood supply of oxygen to the body and leads to the development of cholesterol deposits on the walls of arteries. Eventually, these result in an increased risk of heart attack, stroke, poor circulation in hands and feet, and even impotence.”

**IN SINGAPORE, A BIGGER PERCENTAGE OF MEN (FIVE TO SIX TIMES MORE) COMPARED TO WOMEN SMOKE.**



### CHAIN REACTION

“Smoking has also been shown to result in an increase in insulin resistance, which can result in type II diabetes. What’s more, smoking is linked to increased abdominal fat distribution and increases one’s waist-to-hip ratio. At the same time, one of the common causes of gall bladder cancer is the exposure to carcinogens, and smoking could result in the accumulation of toxic substances in the lungs. Eventually, parts of the lung may fail to function, making smokers prone to lung infection and pneumonia.”

The harmful effects of smoking are not just inherent in the body, but outside as well. Smoking is said to reduce the amount of blood flowing to the skin, eventually drying it out and causing wrinkles and fine lines. Ho says this is true, based on findings by some of today’s most well respected health authorities.

According to the Mayo Clinic, smoking reduces the amount of blood flowing to the skin because of nicotine and results in a reduced supply of oxygen and other nutrients to the skin. Researcher M. Just-Sarobé has also written papers on how many of the chemicals in tobacco smoke damage fibers in the skin and affect the epidermis’ levels of collagen and elastin. ■■■



## A SMOKER'S STORY

It took cabbie Mr Ang Lye Huat a stroke and a heart attack to realize that smoking does exponential harm to the body. The effects of smoking can creep up on you when you least expect it.

Mr Ang had his first cigarette as a 15-year old teenager growing up in a kampung, when a stick of cigarette cost only ten cents. Not long after, he was smoking one to two packs a day (that's up to 20 sticks), a habit he did not want to break. This continued on through the years.

Things changed when at 50, he found himself disoriented, suffering from breathing difficulties. His frantic family called an ambulance and he was whisked off to Tan Tock Seng Hospital where doctors discovered his lungs were infected and filled with tar. He had also suffered a heart attack, and a bypass surgery operation was quickly scheduled for him to go under the knife.

Recovery took about two months and in April this year, Mr Ang went for his final checkup with the hopes that soon, he could resume his work as a cabbie. The ordeal — in particular the “scary operation” — opened his eyes to the dangers of smoking.

“I'm determined not to ever smoke again,” he says. “I chew nicotine gum every day, going through three to five pieces a day. And I don't get tempted when I see smokers around me. In fact, I try to move to another location, so I don't inhale second-hand smoke.

“I hope my experience will encourage readers to give up smoking. I am grateful to my family for their support and care while I was in the hospital,” shares Mr Ang.



PHOTO: EALBERT HO

### BREATHE EASY AGAIN

Some smokers make the decision to stub out for good, but the process of quitting isn't always easy, confirms Ho. For one, smokers have to deal with withdrawal symptoms, which can take various forms.

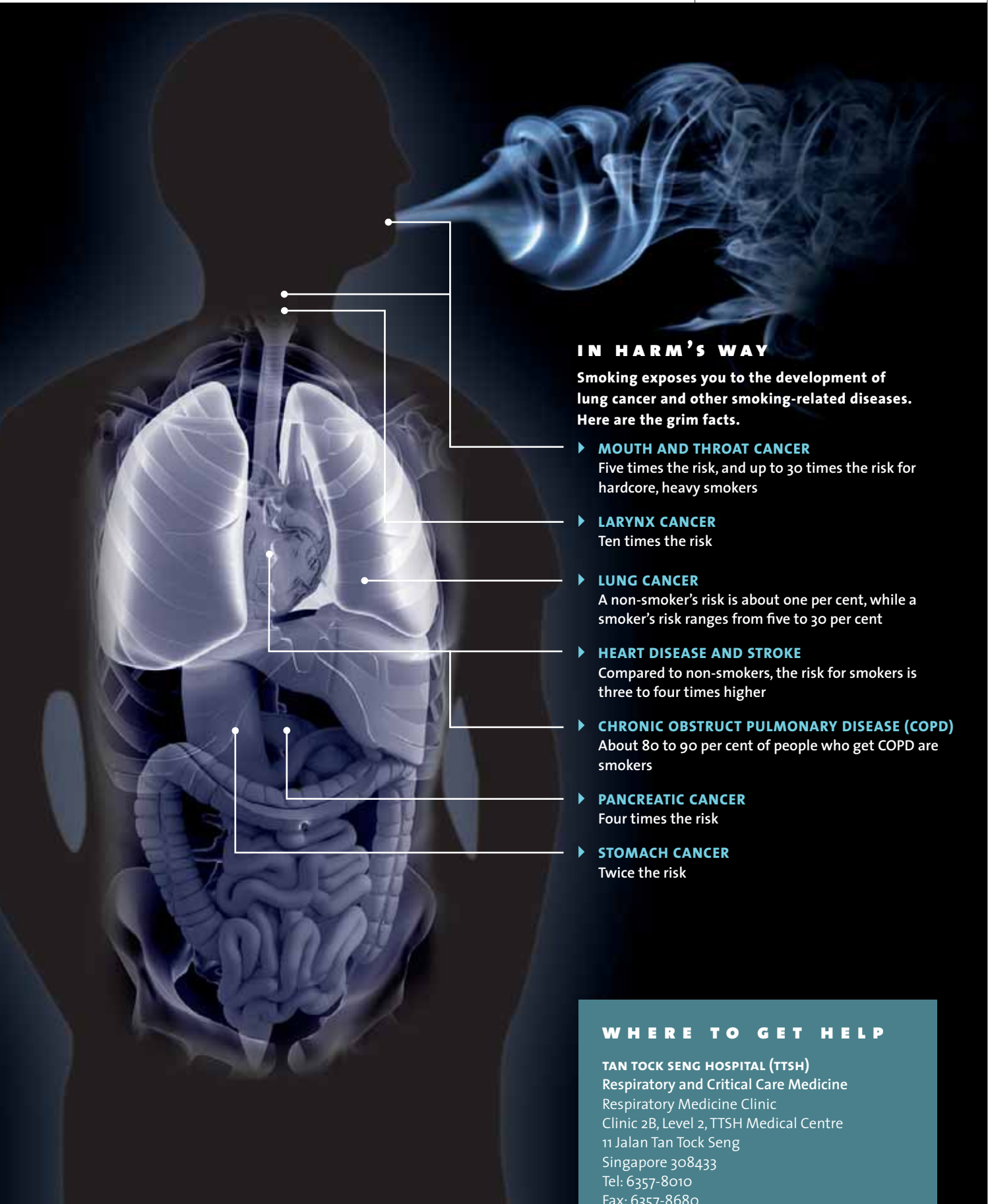
One of the main struggles is physical dependence; when someone smokes, nicotine enters the brain and results in feelings of pleasure. The body adapts to these reward pathways and reinforces the smoker's desire to keep smoking so as to stimulate that amount of pleasure again and again. When a smoker tries to quit smoking, nicotine would be absent from the body; thus feelings of irritation, depression, anxiety, and a craving for the cigarette are experienced.

Some smokers may also get a chesty cough soon after they quit smoking. Ho explains that smokers cough when they are smoking because the chemicals in the cigarette stop the cilia in the lungs from working. This causes dirt, foreign

substances and mucous to irritate the lungs. When a person stops smoking, these cilia begin to work again. This results in the removal of accumulated substances (such as tar), left in the lung from smoking, through coughing fits.

Another common withdrawal symptom one may encounter is a tingling sensation in hands and feet. This is mainly due to the improvement in blood flow. The good news is that most of these withdrawal symptoms only last two to three weeks upon quitting smoking.

Smokers grapple with the above while being treated via today's most effective methods of smoking cessation. Ho confirms that when it comes to reducing withdrawal symptoms and helping smokers quit, popular choices include Nicotine Replacement Therapies (NRTs) which come in the form of lozenges, chewing gums, inhalers and patches; and prescription medications Bupropion and Varenicline, which wean smokers off nicotine. ❖



### IN HARM'S WAY

Smoking exposes you to the development of lung cancer and other smoking-related diseases. Here are the grim facts.

- ▶ **MOUTH AND THROAT CANCER**  
Five times the risk, and up to 30 times the risk for hardcore, heavy smokers
- ▶ **LARYNX CANCER**  
Ten times the risk
- ▶ **LUNG CANCER**  
A non-smoker's risk is about one per cent, while a smoker's risk ranges from five to 30 per cent
- ▶ **HEART DISEASE AND STROKE**  
Compared to non-smokers, the risk for smokers is three to four times higher
- ▶ **CHRONIC OBSTRUCT PULMONARY DISEASE (COPD)**  
About 80 to 90 per cent of people who get COPD are smokers
- ▶ **PANCREATIC CANCER**  
Four times the risk
- ▶ **STOMACH CANCER**  
Twice the risk

### WHERE TO GET HELP

**TAN TOCK SENG HOSPITAL (TTSH)**  
Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine  
Respiratory Medicine Clinic  
Clinic 2B, Level 2, TTSH Medical Centre  
11 Jalan Tan Tock Seng  
Singapore 308433  
Tel: 6357-8010  
Fax: 6357-8680



## > HELP IS OUT THERE

In Singapore, smokers who want to quit can turn to doctors, pharmacists or nurses at hospitals, polyclinics, or even community pharmacies. With the help of a healthcare professional, or any other smoking cessation counsellor, a smoker would receive step-by-step guidance on quitting smoking. The smoking cessation counsellor can guide the smoker by recommending ways of quitting. Call the Health Promotion Board QuitLine at 1800-438-2000.

Outpatient smoking cessation services are conducted on Wednesday afternoons and Friday and Saturday mornings at Tan Tock Seng Hospital. Appointments can be made through the hotline at 6357-7000.

However, the smoker's motivation to quit plays a major role. He or she can turn to family and friends, or former smokers as a good source of encouragement.



### MIND OVER MATTER?

Some say it's easier to quit smoking when you've only been puffing away for a few years — something Ho both agrees and disagrees with.

She explains: "If one has only been a smoker for a short period of time, smoking would not be so much a habitual dependence compared to one who has smoked for many years. However, one may not have encountered smoking-related diseases yet. And in spite of warnings, the smoker may still continue to smoke.

"Meanwhile, some who have smoked for many years may find it hard to quit, but their motivation to quit is higher as they have already seen how badly smoking can affect their health and life. At the end of the day, I believe it all depends on the smoker's desire to quit smoking; if a smoker has only smoked for a few years, or even just smokes two to three cigarettes a day and yet has no real desire or motivation to quit, he or she will often just continue to smoke and fail to let go of the last cigarette."

Some smokers might insist that their habit keeps their weight down and keeps them trim. However, Ho clarifies that even though one might be of a lower weight by two to three kilograms; this is through unhealthy means because a smoker's appetite is suppressed while he or she introduces chemicals into the body.

**SAYING GOODBYE TO CIGARETTES FOR GOOD IS DOING YOUR BODY A FAVOUR DESPITE WHAT'S SEEN AS UNFAVOURABLE SIDE EFFECTS SUCH AS WEIGHT GAIN AND THE LIKE. WITH THE RIGHT MIX OF ADVICE, TREATMENT METHODS AND DETERMINATION, ANYONE CAN STUB OUT FOR GOOD.**

An improvement in one's sense of taste is a common cause of weight gain following instances of smokers cutting down on the number of sticks per day. He or she is likely to eat more due to improved appetite even as metabolism levels slow down. But while weight gain may be inevitable, one way around this is to eat healthily, and start an exercise regime to maintain body weight as well as replace smoking as a habit one gets pleasure from.

Ultimately, saying goodbye to cigarettes for good is doing your body a favour despite what's seen as unfavourable side effects such as weight gain and the like. With the right mix of advice, treatment methods and determination, anyone can stub out for good. The power is really in the hands of the smoker!

For a start, surf the web for more information about the dangers of smoking. You can also sit down with a pen and paper and list the pros and cons of lighting up — from the most obvious to what seems like the most insignificant. You'll find that there is more good than bad to smoking. Carry the list with you or read it once a day to remind yourself about what smoking does. You'll be amazed at the motivational boost you'll receive. Good luck! +

**DID YOU KNOW**

Experts confirm that each puff of a cigarette contains 43 cancer-causing (carcinogenic) compounds as well as four hundred other toxins including nicotine and tar, which clogs the lungs and inhibits the body's capacity to breathe. Here is a breakdown of the harmful ingredients smokers are exposing themselves to.

**NICOTINE**

The ingredient that causes cigarette addiction, it also increases a smoker's risk of getting a heart attack.

**CARBON MONOXIDE**

Reduces the amount of oxygen supplied to the heart and other parts of the body, while damaging blood vessels and increasing the risk of a heart attack.

**ACETONE**

A strong substance, commonly used in nail polish remover.

**TAR**

The same substance used to cover road surfaces, it contains cancer-causing substances.

**ARSENIC**

Used as white ant poison, it increases the risk of cancer such as lung cancer, skin and liver cancer.

**FORMALDEHYDE**

Used for embalming dead bodies, it can result in irritation to the eyes, nose, throat and skin.

**AMMONIA**

Used in floor cleaners, contact with it also causes coughing along with irritation to the eyes, nose, throat and skin.

**CYANIDE**

Contact with it results in breathing difficulties and chest pain.

