

Smokers see decline in ability to smell, rise in laryngitis, and upper airway issues

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As Americans prepare for a day without cigarettes and tobacco products as part of the American Cancer Society Great American Smokeout (R) (November 20), new research gives them more reasons to extend that break to a lifetime, according to the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery Foundation (AAO-HNSF). Among the new research presented at the organization's annual meeting in September 2008 are studies that link cigarette smoking and upper airway symptoms ("smoker's nose"), the loss of smokers' ability to smell common odors, and most alarming, the role second-hand smoke plays in the rise of cases of "environmental laryngitis."

The first study, presented by Norwegian researchers, reveals that among 2,294 patients being evaluated for obstructive sleep apnea, snoring, or nose-related issues, smokers were 12 to 27 percent higher than non-smokers in 8 of the 13 possible symptoms. The researchers believe that quitting smoking should be a primary therapeutic measure for patients with these upper airway ailments.

In another study, Brazilian researchers examined the link between smoking and loss of smell. In a clinical study examining 56 healthy volunteers, current and former smokers in the group had greater trouble smelling butanol, an alcohol used widely in odor testing because of its distinct and powerful smell. The authors believe this confirms that smokers will experience altered ability to smell as they continue the habit.

A third study cites second-hand tobacco smoke as one of the primary causes of what the authors term "environmental laryngitis," along with allergens and air pollution. The study, authored by researchers at the University of California-Davis, indicates through animal models that exposure to second-hand smoke can trigger laryngitis symptoms, including hoarseness, cough, and chronic clearing of the throat. Researchers and physicians have generally attributed laryngitis to a viral infection and overuse of the voice; however, this new research now raises significant concerns surrounding the condition, especially as air quality and ozone levels worldwide continue to decline.

Source: American Academy of Otolaryngology

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