



The Health Effects of 'Light' Cigarettes

What Do People Think a 'Light' Cigarette Is?

Some people think that by switching from a 'regular' to a 'light' brand of cigarettes, they can reduce the amount of tar (poison), nicotine (what makes smokers hooked) and carbon monoxide (poison) they are exposed to.

'Light' cigarettes come with different names. Some are called 'ultra light'; some are simply called 'mild'.

Are Light Cigarettes Lighter?

No.

Here is an example that shows 'light' cigarettes are not really any lighter. According to Health Canada, by blocking the filter vents – which most 'light' cigarette smokers do - Export 'A' Medium can deliver as much as 36.7 milligrams of tar per cigarettes and, if you block the vents on an Export 'A' Light, the cigarette can deliver 38.8 milligrams of tar.

What Are the Health Effects of Smoking 'Regular' Cigarettes?

The list is very long. Here are some of the main effects:

- increased risk of heart disease,
- increased risk of stroke,
- increased risk of lung cancer,
- increased risk of larynx cancer,
- increased risk of bladder cancer,
- increased risk of emphysema.

What Are the Health Effects of Smoking 'Light' Cigarettes?

Smokers of 'light' cigarettes face the same risks of disease and death because 'light' cigarettes are not different from 'regular' cigarettes. 'Light' cigarette smokers face the same risk of heart disease and of lung cancer as regular smokers.

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in Canada. Every year it kills more than car accidents, suicides, drug abuse, murder and AIDS combined.

Is Secondhand Smoke from 'Light' Cigarettes Any Safer Than That of 'Regular' Cigarettes?

No.

'Light' cigarettes contain the same chemicals as 'regular' cigarettes. The only difference between a 'light' and a 'regular' cigarette is the ventilation holes in the filter. 'Light' cigarettes have tiny holes in the filter that allow more air to enter the cigarette. This air dilution is what gives 'light' cigarettes their lighter taste but this does not change the amount of chemicals in the smoke. Secondhand smoke from 'light' cigarettes is just as dangerous as secondhand smoke from 'regular' cigarettes.



What Are the Effects of Breathing Secondhand Smoke?

Here are a few of the main effects:

- increased risk of lung cancer,
- increased risk heart disease,
- more ear infections in children,
- worsening of asthma.

Are There Any Health Benefits to Smoking 'Light' Cigarettes?

There are no known health benefits. 'Light' cigarettes are NOT an alternative to quitting.

Sources:

Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS)

Ministerial Advisory Council on Tobacco Control. Tar ratings for three best-selling brand families (1999 data for regular length brand variants).

Health Canada, Yields of Tar, Nicotine and CO by Selected Brands of Canadian Tobacco Products, 1999, as reported in Protégez-vous, January 2000, p.6.

Wakeham H. Some unexpected observations on tar and nicotine smoker behaviour. Philip Morris; 1974. (Bates Number 1000260471).

National Cancer Institute. Risks Associated with Smoking Cigarettes with Low Machine-Mesured Yields of Tar and Nicotine. Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph no. 13. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute. 2001.

Updated November 2001