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### **Sue Ann Says: Smoking Can Lead to Depression...Depression Can Lead to Smoking**

Smoking is bad for you. You and I already know this. It causes cancer, emphysema and heart disease among other health maladies. Therefore, I'm going to spare you the "quit smoking" lecture. Let me just say, I smoked for 20 years give or take a few. My habit began with a coming of age experiment during my teens and just kept on going! And, though I sometimes miss that morning cigarette with a cup of coffee, I will never smoke again. There are hundreds of reasons not to, but there's one that's gaining attention – studies are showing that there is a link between smoking cigarettes and depression.

It is still not entirely clear exactly how smoking and depression are related, but here are a few theories:

- **Depression leads to smoking.** It may be that people who are depressed turn to smoking, hoping to make themselves feel better and alleviate their depression symptoms.
- **Smoking causes depression.** Recent research suggests that an increased risk of depression is among the many negative effects of smoking, possibly because nicotine damages certain pathways in the brain that regulate mood. As a result, nicotine may contribute to mood swings.
- **A vicious cycle is at play.** Other studies have suggested that smoking makes people more depressed and depression makes people turn to smoking — smoking and depression may actually perpetuate each other.
- **There may be shared genetic triggers.** It has also been proposed that certain genetic predispositions may increase both the risk of smoking and depression in some people.

### **Women and Smoking and Depression**

An extensive Australian study found that women who suffer from depression are twice as likely to smoke as women who do not have underlying mental health problems. They found evidence to support the belief that women do not smoke because they are depressed but rather are depressed because they smoke.

It turns out that major depressive disorders in women often seemed to come after they began smoking. Those who were heavy smokers – a pack or two a day – were far more likely to suffer severe or major depression than women who occasionally smoked or did not smoke at all.

This research indicates what many scientists have previously believed; cigarette smoke either increases or agitates the underlying condition of depression in many, especially women. This means that by continuing to smoke women are making themselves suffer from depression.

## **Secondhand Smoke and Depression**

We already know that people who don't smoke, but who spend a lot of time around people who do, are at an increased risk of smoking-related death and disease. This is significant, since so many people are exposed to secondhand smoke.

Now studies have shown that secondhand smoke exposure may also be linked to depression. One found that those who never smoked or smoked fewer than 100 cigarettes in their lifetime but lived with or worked around smokers were more likely to have major depression than non-smokers not exposed to secondhand smoke.

### **What This Means for You**

If you have depression, smoking or exposure to secondhand smoke could make your symptoms worse. Likewise, if you're a smoker, an increased risk of depression is one more reason you should try to stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke exposure.

As most smokers know, however, quitting is easier said than done. Our strategic partner for our First Breath smoking cessation program for pregnant women, and dear friend, Dr. Michael Fiore, a clinically active, tenured professor of medicine at the University of Wisconsin, and founder and director of the University of Wisconsin Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention (UW-CTRI) says, "For people already managing depression, giving up cigarettes can be even trickier, since quitting may trigger worsening symptoms of depression. But, these symptoms can be managed and quitting smoking may contribute to improved depression, particularly if you are discouraged by the limits smoking places on your health and activities." He emphasized that it is particularly important for those with a history of depression to get help you need to quit smoking – don't be afraid to tell your doctor and ask for suggestions.

Remember that it is completely natural to feel irritable and sad in the first days and weeks after you stop smoking. Also keep in mind that many smokers who have depression experience more severe nicotine withdrawal symptoms than those who don't. But sticking with your plan and staying away from cigarettes is worth it — it will help you feel better in the long run and, ultimately, proud that you have conquered the challenging task of quitting smoking.

Most people feel better within a month after they stop smoking. If your feelings of sadness and depression are overwhelming or if your depression continues for more than a month, be sure to talk to your doctor.

Because it all begins with a healthy woman...

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Need help quitting smoking? Contact the Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line at **1-800-QUIT-NOW** (784-8669). It offers free, confidential, non-judgmental coaching and information about how to quit to any Wisconsin resident who calls. The Quit Line is available every day from 7:00 am – 11:00 pm.

For more tips on successfully quitting tobacco use, visit UW-CTRI at [www.ctri.wisc.edu](http://www.ctri.wisc.edu).

*Sue Ann Thompson is founder and president of the Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation (WWHF), a statewide non-profit organization whose mission is to help Wisconsin women and their families reach their healthiest potential. WWHF provides programs and conducts forums that focus on education, prevention, and early detection of diseases that affect women the most; connects individuals to health resources; produces and distributes the most up-to-date health education and resource materials; and, awards grants and scholarships to women health researchers and related community non-profits. To learn more, visit [wwhf.org](http://wwhf.org) or call 1-800-448-5148.*