

Smoking: a bad habit that makes people sick

El tabaquismo, un mal hábito que enferma

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According to the Royal Spanish Academy, a habit is defined as a special way of behavior or conduct acquired by repetition of equal or similar actions or originated by instinctive tendency [1]. They can be beneficial or harmful to our health. Smoking is considered a harmful habit that generates addiction and causes disease.

Smoking can be defined as a chronic and addictive, easily preventable inflammatory illness that shortens people's lives and causes disabilities. It can result in premature death, especially for long-term smokers, due to the development of chronic, irreversible diseases.

According to the Pan-American Health Organization, there are 1.3 billion tobacco users in the world. It kills 8 million people every year, out of whom 7 million are active smokers and one million are passive. The life expectancy of smokers is 10 years shorter compared to non-smokers. Tobacco-related mortality in the Americas is 24% from cancer and 45% from chronic respiratory diseases. Tobacco is the only legal consumer product that kills half its users; they will die from related diseases, losing an average of 10 to 15 years of life. Children and adolescents who use electronic cigarettes are at least twice as likely to smoke cigarettes later in life [2].

By 2020, the prevalence of tobacco use among teenagers aged 13 to 15 in the Americas was 11.3%. As of 2016, the prevalence of tobacco use among adolescents in Ecuador was 4.60%. In 2017, the prevalence of tobacco consumption among adults in the Americas was 15.2%, the highest among men. The good news is that the trend of tobacco consumption is declining in people aged 15 and over [3]. However, the consumption of electronic cigarettes is different; among children aged 13 to 15, the rates have doubled and even tripled in the last 5 years.

To understand how smoking causes non-communicable and carcinogenic respiratory diseases, it is necessary to know that cigarette smoke is an aerosol resulting from incomplete combustion of tobacco composed of more than 7000 substances that are pharmacologically active, cytotoxic, and mutagenic. Seventy of them are recognized as carcinogens, responsible for 30% of cancers. The cigarette has a main smoke stream and a lateral one. The main, which is 95% gaseous, contains billions of particles with a size of 0.2 to 0.5 microns and are therefore breathable. Moreover, the high concentrations of reactive free radicals in each inhalation has effects on

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the respiratory system (4). Thus, the two main effects produced by tobacco smoke on the respiratory tract and that generate diseases are the induction of inflammation and carcinogenic mutagenic, assisted by infections by alteration of mucociliary clearance, giving rise to pathologies such as Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema, chronic bronchitis, asthma, interstitial lung diseases, pulmonary fibrosis, and lung cancer [4].

What about the e-cigarette or vaping? Initially proposed as an alternative and safer measure than cigarettes or tobacco both by consumption and method of quitting smoking, current evidence indicates that this is not the case. Both the World Health Organization and the consensus or guidelines of the Respiratory Scientific Societies indicate that there is no scientific evidence to demonstrate that e-cigarettes are safe, as they can promote the development of obstructive airway diseases, severe inflammatory lung diseases such as EVALI (E-cigarette or Vaping use-Associated Lung Injury), and because their toxic chemicals released in the steam can cause cancer. Nor is there any scientific evidence to indicate that e-cigarettes are an effective method for smoking cessation and instead increase tobacco consumption because of their nicotine content, which we know is an addictive substance; in many cases, smokers end up consuming both products [5,6].

So, how can we help smokers? The answer is tobacco cessation, which is a program that combines psychological support with pharmacological support. Logically, it is not 100% effective because there are individual or genetic factors of greater or lesser sensitivity in people who modify their response to scientifically established methods to quit smoking [7].

The statement published by the ALAT (Latin American Thorax Association) “emphasizes the importance of strengthening the control of tobacco and electronic cigarettes in Latin America, by implementing stricter regulations, educating the community, increasing taxes, promoting smoking cessation, including new therapeutic options such as Cytisine, and continuing to combat the influence of the tobacco industry in formulating health policies” [8].

Then, it is possible to conclude that smoking is a chronic addictive disease that can give rise to high morbimortality non-curative pathologies with high-cost management. While it is true that there is a decrease in tobacco consumption in young people and adults, the same is not the case with the use of e-cigarettes or vaping, which is increasing in children, adolescents, and young people who have not previously smoked, thus increasing the risks to their health.

1. Abbreviations

COPD: Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

EVALI: E-cigarette or vaping use-associated lung injury

ALAT: Latin American Thorax Association

2. Administrative information

2.1. Additional Files

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