

Why Smoking Is Worse for Women

Though every smoker would benefit from kicking the habit, smoking is not an equal-opportunity health problem. Only 21 percent of adult women smoke compared with 25 percent of men, but the latest research shows women smokers are more likely to get lung cancer than men. The occurrence of lung cancer in women has increased four-fold since 1965 and is the leading cause of cancer death for both genders. But female smokers are 2.7 times likelier to get lung cancer than male smokers, according to a recent study from

New York Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell, in New York City. Women who smoke regularly also boost their risk for breast cancer by 30 percent, says the California Department of Health Services. As researchers struggle to determine why smoking increases these diseases in women, one theory that has emerged is that women are susceptible to a mutation of the gene that assists in removing cigarettes' toxic effects from the body, says Marianne J. Legato, M.D., founder of the Partnership for Gender Specific Medicine at Columbia Uni-



versity, in New York City. For tips on how to quit, visit www.americanlegacy.org or look for information on The Great American Smokeout at www.cancer.org.

—Molly M. Ginty

CAN I REALLY CHOOSE MY BABY'S SEX?

Q: I've heard that there are kits that couples who want to have a baby can buy that can let them choose the child's gender. Do they really work?

A: Medical experts say no. Gender-selection kits, which may contain ovulation tests, digital thermometers, douches and oral supplements, are based on methods—including changes in diet, timing of intercourse and monitoring vaginal pH levels—that the manufacturers claim influence gender. GenSelect, one company that distributes such kits for a cost of \$199, says its product has a success rate of up to 96 percent and cites

independent studies on its Web site to support its claims. But Randy Morris, M.D., a reproductive endocrinologist in Chicago, points out that the kits are not FDA approved, and says the studies aren't large enough to prove the results can be attributed to anything other than chance. He says that the only reliable gender-selection techniques are also the most expensive ones: preimplantation genetic diagnosis (creating embryos outside of the womb and testing them for gender before implantation) and flow cytometry, a new sperm-sorting technology. These procedures can cost anywhere from \$2,500 to \$18,000.

—Maureen Kennedy