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More Reasons to Quit

Most of us know that there is a link between smoking and lung cancer. But the toll that smoking takes on your health doesn't stop there. Smoking has also been linked to three of the most common causes of blindness: age-related macular degeneration (AMD), cataracts and diabetic retinopathy.

25% of all cases of AMD are linked to smoking.

AMD is the leading cause of blindness in Americans over the age of 50. People who smoke are three to four times more likely to develop AMD. This disease causes the tissues of the macula, the part of the retina responsible for central vision, to break down. As a result, the patient experiences "tunnel vision."

While there is no way to repair the damage that has already occurred, treatments can help to slow progression of the disease. Several studies have shown that using nutritional supplements that contain antioxidants and beta-carotene can boost the effect of treatment. Smokers should consult their physician before taking these supplements because some research indicates that beta-carotene increases the risk of lung cancer.

More than 1 million Cataract surgeries are performed in the United States every year.

Cataracts are the most common cause of preventable blindness in the world. Smoking is known to increase their development by introducing free radicals into our bodies. The free radicals break down tissues, including the eye's lens, while also lowering levels of the antioxidants that enable our bodies to fight the tissue breakdown.

4.1 million people have Diabetic Retinopathy.

Diabetic retinopathy is caused by complications of diabetes and can eventually lead to blindness. When a diabetic's sugar levels are not controlled, tiny blood vessels in the retina can become damaged, blocking vital nutrients and oxygen. Since smoking also decreases blood flow, it can aggravate this condition and lead to permanent vision loss.

Smoking increases the risk of developing many health problems and even interferes with their treatment. It is never too late to quit! Research shows that those who quit smoking can decrease the severity of many of these diseases and open the door to more treatment options.

Sources: American Optometric Association, National Eye Institute, Prevent Blindness America, Archives of Ophthalmology

