



## What you need to know about...

# Women and Smoking

More than 178,000 women die each year from smoking-related illnesses, the leading of which are lung cancer, heart disease and lung disease. Smoking can also lead to osteoporosis, cancers of the mouth, stomach, pancreas, kidney, bladder, esophagus, voice box, and cervix, and unwanted physical changes such as skin wrinkling.

Most women don't smoke, but many of those that do started when they were teenagers. In the U.S., 18.1% of women smoke, compared to 23.9% of men. Although fewer women smoke, the bad news is that this gap has narrowed over the years, and women are now facing a larger burden of smoking-related illnesses.

### **THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY**

Historically, tobacco industry marketing has tried to entice women smokers by using ads that link smoking with independence and desirability. These campaigns exploit the social pressures typically faced by women and young girls. Not only does smoking become a symbol for glamour, it is also disguised as a way to lose or control weight. Tobacco companies have introduced brands targeted at women such as Virginia Slims, Capri, Misty and Camel No.9, as well as "low-tar" or "light" cigarettes. Women are more likely than men to report smoking "light" or "low tar" cigarettes, and many believe them to be less harmful. In reality, smoking is always dangerous, no matter what brand of cigarettes are smoked, and

"light" and "low tar" cigarettes are just as harmful.

### **SMOKING DURING PREGNANCY**

In addition to the direct health effects of smoking on a woman, smoking or exposure to secondhand smoke during pregnancy can increase the risk of ectopic pregnancies, spontaneous abortions, low birthweight infants, sudden infant death syndrome, fetal brain damage and mental retardation among infants. Female smokers who are not pregnant have an increased risk of infertility than nonsmoking females. If you are pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant, quitting smoking is the best thing you can do for your health and the health of your baby. Women are more likely to quit during pregnancy than any other time in their lives.

### **WOMEN AND QUITTING**

Quitting greatly reduces the risk of dying prematurely, regardless of your age, how long you have smoked or the severity of your addiction. Methods for quitting are varied, and there is no one magic bullet for success. Research shows that women may be more likely than men to use assistance such as counseling, self-help materials and nicotine replacement therapy. Women wishing to quit may also choose to join a smoking cessation group. Support from family, friends or even strangers can play an important role in helping you to quit and overcome challenges you may face. Contact RHAMC for more information on quitting.