

December
1952

Reader's Digest

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Recent medical researches on the relationship of smoking and lung cancer

Cancer by the Carton

Condensed from Christian Herald

Roy Norr

FOR THREE DECADES the medical controversy over the part played by smoking in the rise of bronchiogenic carcinoma, better known as cancer of the lung, has largely been kept from public notice. More than 26 years ago the late Dr. James Ewing, distinguished pathologist and leading spirit in the organization of the American Association for Cancer Research (now the American Cancer Society), pleaded for a public educational campaign.

"One may hardly aim to eliminate the tobacco habit," he wrote in his famous essay on cancer prevention, "but cancer propaganda should emphasize the danger signs that go with it."

No one questions that tobacco smoke irritates the mucous lining of the mouth, nose and throat, or that it aggravates hoarseness, coughing, chronic bronchitis and tonsillitis. It is accepted without argument that smoking is forbidden in cases of gastric and duodenal ulcers; that it interferes with normal digestion; that it contracts the blood vessels,

increases the heart rate, raises the blood pressure. In many involvements of heart disease, the first order from the doctor is to cut out smoking immediately.

But what gives grave concern to public-health leaders is that the increase in lung-cancer mortality shows a suspicious parallel to the enormous increase in cigarette consumption (now 2500 cigarettes per year for every human being in the United States).

The latest study, which is published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (May 27, 1952), by a group of noted cancer workers headed by Dr. Alton Ochsner, former president of the American Cancer Society and director of the famous Ochsner Clinic in New Orleans, discloses that, during the period 1920 to 1948, deaths from bronchiogenic carcinoma in the United States increased *more than ten times*, from 1.1 to 11.3 per 100,000 of the population. From 1938 to 1948, lung-cancer deaths increased *144 percent*. At the present time

cancer of the mouth and respiratory tract kills 19,000 men and 5000 women annually in the United States.

"It is probable that bronchiogenic carcinoma soon will become more frequent than any other cancer of the body, unless something is done to prevent its increase," is Dr. Ochsner's conclusion. "It is frightening to speculate on the possible number of bronchiogenic cancers that might develop as the result of the tremendous number of cigarettes consumed in the two decades from 1930 to 1950."

A survey recently published by the United Nations World Health Organization cites the conclusion of an investigation carried out by the Medical Research Council of England and Wales that "above the age of 45 the risk of developing the disease increases in simple proportion with the amount smoked, and may be 50 times as great among those who smoked 25 or more cigarettes daily as among nonsmokers."

A study of 684 cases, made by Ernest L. Wynder and Evarts A. Graham for the American Cancer Society and published in the *AMA Journal*, May 27, 1950, stated this conclusion: "Excessive and prolonged use of tobacco, especially cigarettes, seems to be an important

factor in the induction of bronchiogenic carcinoma."

More recently Wynder, now associated with Memorial Cancer Center in New York, expanded the statement: "The more a person smokes the greater is the risk of developing cancer of the lung, whereas the risk was small in a nonsmoker or a light smoker."

In his summary *Some Practical Aspects of Cancer Prevention*, Wynder lists tobacco as the *major factor* in cancer of the larynx, the pharynx, the esophagus and the oral cavity. "In 1926," he points out, "Ewing wrote that 'though a great body of clinical information shows that many forms of cancer are due to preventable causes there has been little systematic research to impress this fact on the medical profession or to convey it to the public.' This was true then, as it is today."

After a study of world-wide medical opinion, Wynder reaches the same conclusion arrived at by Ewing 26 years ago. "Cancer of the lung," he reports, "presents one of the most striking opportunities for preventive measures in cancer."

Cancer workers want something done, and done now on the basis of present clinical knowledge, to alert the smoking public.



Whatever a woman looks askance at,
Her husband takes a second glance at.

— George Walton in *The Saturday Evening Post*