# Smoking and Menopause

by AFRA WILLMORE

## How Smoking Impacts Menopause Symptoms

If you're a smoker struggling to give up the habit, I have some information about how smoking affects women in relation to menopause that might just prove to be the motivation you need.

Most women don’t realize that being a smoker can not only hasten the start of the menopause but can also increase the severity of symptoms AND increase the incidence of breast cancer post-menopause.
Earlier Menopause

A study by the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania found that smoking women of all ethnicities, but white women in particular, were more likely to start menopause up to a staggering nine years earlier than non-smoking women.

Menopause starts as the estrogen your body produces starts to decline, and because of the anti-estrogen effect smoking has, regular and long term smokers could find perimenopause starts earlier than it does for non-smokers.

Admittedly the “nine years earlier” statistic is extreme. Many other studies have shown that those who have smoked for a long time, or regularly, are likely to go into menopause one to two years earlier than non-smoking women. This will have the biggest impact on women who maybe hoped to have one last baby before their fertility declines.

### Worse Symptoms

Study results also seem to back up anecdotal evidence that women who smoke suffer more severe and more frequent hot flashes than women who don’t.

The study by the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine reported that African-American smokers were 84% more likely to experience hot flashes than African-American non-smokers. White smokers were 56% more likely to have hot flashes than white non-smokers.

### Treatment Problems

Another thing to think about if you are worried about menopause symptoms is that smokers often don’t respond as well to tablet forms of HRT.

In fact, some physicians refuse to prescribe HRT in any form for smokers since the risk of heart attack and stroke, which is already higher in smokers than the general population, is considered to be even higher among those who smoke and take HRT.

*Next page: cancer risk, premature aging and cost.*

**Post-Menopause Cancer Risk**

Additionally, the US National Cancer Institute claims that women smokers are 19% more susceptible to develop breast cancer after menopause than women who don't smoke after menopause.

It won't be news to anyone that these statistics are alongside the risk factors that affect anyone who smokes — an increased risk of heart disease, cancers, stroke and death. It really does give pause for thought.

The good news is that giving up smoking before the age of 40 can completely negate these risks, while giving up by 50 can give you back six years. Even quitting at 60 could gain you four years. It doesn't sound long — until you consider what you could do in that time and how much better you might feel after quitting.

**Premature Aging**

If the threat of hot flashes, cancer and an early menopause aren't enough to encourage you to put down the packet of cigarettes, let me appeal to your vanity.

Going into menopause may precipitate an increase wrinkles for many women as the change in hormones can lead to a change in skin type, drying it out or conversely leading to oily skin with teenage-type breakouts!

Meanwhile, smoking is renowned for making wrinkles worse just from the expressions people pull while smoking — pursing lips to inhale and squinting to avoid the smoke. In addition, wrinkles can appear sooner or be more noticeable in smokers as many of the thousands of chemicals that make up cigarettes damage collagen, which helps keep skin firm, strong and elastic.

Bring together the combined effects of smoking and menopause and you could be left looking many years older than your non-smoking peers with deep wrinkles which no amount of face cream will fix.

**Counting the Cost**

Still not convinced? If the thought of poor health, tortoise-like skin, and the prospect of a potentially early grave aren't enough to convince you to quit, let's talk about cold hard cash. Putting all other arguments aside, it's a fact that smoking is an expensive habit — with the cost of cigarettes rising each year how long can your purse take the strain?

Take a few minutes and work out exactly what you spend on your habit each day, week, month and year. Then look at that figure and work out what else you might be able to spend that money on. New furniture to replace yours which is possibly stained and smelly from smoke? A nice break away? A new car, TV, clothes? The possibilities are endless.

Entering menopause can lead to depression, feelings of low self-worth and often women complain of feeling older than their years, "past it" or frumpy.

Do yourself a favor — quit smoking and treat yourself to a new wardrobe, or membership to a gym or something the whole family can enjoy and I guarantee you will feel better in the long run.