

THE LINK BETWEEN PAIN AND SMOKING

Most people will have some type of musculoskeletal (MSK) pain in their lifetime. MSK refers to the parts of your body that support you and help you move. These parts are your bones, tendons, ligaments, and muscles. MSK pain commonly happens in the back, shoulders, neck, knees, and hips.

Smoking may make MSK pain more likely. If you already have pain, smoking may worsen and prolong it. Pain may also make you feel more stress. When you feel stressed, you may be more likely to light up. Smoking more may make your pain feel worse. So, stress, smoking, and pain are all linked.

How does smoking affect pain?

Smoking tobacco can cause changes in your nerves and how they work. These nerve changes may make your pain feel worse.

Smoking can also decrease blood flow to the body, including to the parts that are in pain. Blood carries the oxygen and other nutrients your body needs. It is harder for your body to stay strong and heal well if it isn't getting the blood it needs. Injuries and pain may be more likely when smoking decreases blood flow

Smoking can also boost inflammation in the body, which can cause more pain. Smoking can affect hormones and other substances that help rebuild your bones and muscles and keep them strong. Smoking is also toxic to osteoblasts, the cells that rebuild your bones. And research suggests a link between smoking and damage to the discs that support your spine and help you move without pain.

Why quit smoking?

If you quit smoking, your blood flow is likely to improve. Your nerves should start to work better. And your pain may decrease.

Of course, quitting smoking will not stop your chronic pain all by itself. You most likely will need to take other steps to ease your pain. Work with your healthcare team to help you tailor a quit plan as part of your overall pain management program.

Getting support to help you quit

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, along with each state, offers free support for those wishing to quit smoking.

Learn more at <http://smokefree.gov/talk-to-an-expert>.

