



**May 6, 2010**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT: Maryanne Aldrich**

**(603) 747-9189**

## **Smoking and Back Pain**

Over the past two decades, researchers have uncovered a strong correlation between smoking and back pain. The more you smoke, the more bothersome the pain.

Oxygen must be present in order to maintain healthy discs and ligaments in order to prevent back injury or to achieve full recovery after a back injury or surgery. Two chemicals found in cigarette smoke, carbon monoxide and nicotine, effectively reduces the level of oxygen in the tissues of the back. Carbon monoxide decreases the percentage of oxygen and nutrients in the blood, whereas nicotine constricts blood vessels. This "double whammy" markedly reduces availability of oxygen to starving tissues trying to maintain or build strength.

The following is conventional wisdom regarding smoking and back pain:

### **The bad news...**

- Smokers are almost three times more likely to develop low back pain compared to non-smokers.
- Due to decreased circulation of oxygen, and nutrient flow to the spine, smoking is associated with:
  - degenerative disc disease
  - osteoporosis and increased risk of fractured hips, wrists and spine
  - increased sensitivity to pain
- The length of time a person has smoked has little influence on the amount of damage done to the spine. Those who have short smoking histories have already started the process of early degenerative change to their spine.

### **The good news...**

- Once you have quit smoking:
  - Nerve endings of the back will begin to re-grow due to restored blood flow.
  - A significant decrease in back pain and further disc damage can be noted.
- Cutting down on smoking, while not nearly as effective as quitting, can decrease the chance of developing back problems and restore good blood flow.
- Second-hand smoke carries similar circulatory risks, yet due to societal changes exposure to secondary smoke is avoidable in most situations.

In conclusion, quitting smoking helps prevent damage, reduces further damage and decreases the pain associated with spinal injury/surgery. Speak to your health care provider about how to quit smoking and QUIT TODAY!

This article can also be found online at [www.painmd.com](http://www.painmd.com). If you have any topics that you would like to see discussed in this column please call Maryanne at (603) 747-9189 or email [maldrich@cottagehospital.org](mailto:maldrich@cottagehospital.org)