

Just How Casual is Casual Smoking?

by Sara Turner

“Oh I’m not a smoker...I’ll only have a couple at the bar, on weekends.” Sound familiar? Although the number of regular smokers has been on the decline for the past thirty years, a new phenomenon may have taken its place...the social or casual smoker.

Who is the Casual Smoker?

Casual smokers are an anomaly and are difficult to study as a group since they do not define themselves as smokers and are unlikely to truthfully participate in survey type studies. Casual smokers smoke on an irregular basis, perhaps only with a certain group of friends, or often only after a couple of alcoholic beverages. In general, casual smokers are often defined as any non-daily smoker. However, it is important to understand that this covers a wide range; smoking from a couple times a week to a couple times a month.

Is it an Addiction?

Most casual smokers will not categorize themselves as smokers because they claim that they are “not addicted.” Since they only smoke occasionally and by choice, they often don’t associate their habits with the addictive quality of nicotine. This does NOT mean that they are not at risk for addiction. While a casual smoker may not be likely to experience the nicotine dependence and cravings a regular smoker experiences, studies have shown that **continuing social smoking patterns over a period of one year makes you 50% more likely to develop nicotine addiction.**

It is fair to say that most casual smokers are not addicted to nicotine - they are addicted to smoking. What this means is, they have come to associate social smoking as being an essential part of their weekend celebrations. Stopping by the beer store and then the convenience store for a pack of cigarettes or cigarillos seem to be both equally necessary in planning a fun evening.

What about Cigarillos?

One very common trend is the use of cigarillos in social smoking environments. In fact many casual smokers smoke only cigarillos. They are often flavoured to be more appealing to the nonsmoker. The common misconception is that cigarillos pose little or no health risks. **In fact they contain three times the tobacco than a cigarette,** and expose the user to just as much of the poisonous carbon monoxide gas.

How about your health?

The important thing to know about casual smoking is that in the long term it is not safe. The health risks associated with smoking are cumulative, building up with each puff. So whether you smoke every day or just a few on Fridays, each individual cigarette adds to the toxins you’ve introduced to your lungs and the carbon monoxide you’ve added to your blood. Add to this the probability of a casual smoker becoming a regular smoker, and the prospects aren’t good. What may seem like just a few cigarettes on a Friday night, adds up pretty quickly over the course of several weeks, and normalizing the idea of smoking puts you one step closer to addiction.

So maybe being a ‘Casual Smoker’ isn’t as casual as you think.

Here’s the challenge, next time you go out on the town - **Leave The Pack Behind.**

For more information about smoking habits and health, visit
www.LeaveThePackBehind.org

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