

# Where There's Smoke, There's **FIRE!**

## The Smoking and Breast Cancer Link

BY JENNIFER LEACH

**Everyone** is afraid of something—whether those fears are rational or irrational, well, that's another story. Personally, I'm afraid of all kinds of things - like flying and spiders. In fact, I could fill up the page just listing my own phobias. My coworkers tell me that some of my fears are completely irrational, but what do they know? One of my biggest fears is that I may develop breast cancer sometime during my life. When someone I know is touched by breast cancer, it always reinforces this fear for me. I talk myself off the ledge by thinking that I eat right (most of the time), I

and breast cancer does not run in my family. However, a recent presentation I attended really made me stop and reevaluate my risk. This presentation entitled "Changing Policy to Reduce Tobacco Use" by Dr. Stanton Glantz evaluated, in part, the link between secondhand smoke and breast cancer in younger, premenopausal women. One of the conclusions from Dr. Glantz's research is that secondhand smoke increases the risk for breast cancer in younger women; exposure between puberty and lactation is probably the most dangerous time.

I grew up in the 80s when smoking was commonplace. People smoked in hospitals, airplanes, offices, basically everywhere. Since then, we have learned that smoking cigarettes causes lung cancer, stroke, heart attack, stomach cancer, and a multitude of other illnesses. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, "Smoking harms nearly every organ of the body." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cites 1 in every 5 deaths as smoking related with an estimated 443,000 US deaths attributed to smoking every year. Smoking is the single greatest avoidable cause of disease and death according to a US Surgeon General Study (2006).

As times change and medical advances and research improve, we are learning more about the dangers of secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke is also called Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) and is defined as the smoke that is exhaled from a smoker (mainstream smoke) as well as the smoke coming directly from the cigarette itself (sidestream smoke). According to the US Surgeon General, secondhand smoke causes heart disease and lung cancer in

non-smoking adults. Children exposed to secondhand smoke have a higher risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), acute respiratory infections, ear infections, and worsening of asthma symptoms. Approximately 50,000 annual deaths can be attributed to secondhand smoke with 790 deaths in South Carolina ([tobaccofreekids.org](http://tobaccofreekids.org)).

While the link between secondhand smoke and breast cancer is still considered controversial, the EPA classified secondhand smoke as a "known human carcinogen" with more than 60 chemical compounds known or suspected of causing cancer. Twenty of these chemical compounds have been found to cause breast cancer in rodents, and we also know that tobacco smoke can be found in breast tissue and breast milk ([cancer.org](http://cancer.org)). More evidence of the link can be found in a 2009 report by a Canadian Expert Panel charged with "the mandate to comprehensively examine the evidence regarding a possible relationship between tobacco smoke and breast cancer." The panel's findings: "The association between secondhand smoke and breast cancer in younger, primarily premenopausal women who have never smoked is consistent with causality." They also reported that "tobacco smoke is one of the few modifiable risks for breast cancer and it impacts many women. Young women in particular should understand that available evidence suggests the relationship between breast cancer and both active smoking and secondhand smoke is consistent with causality" (Canadian Expert Panel on Tobacco Smoke and Breast Cancer Risk, April 2009, [www.otru.org/pdf/special/expert\\_panel\\_tobacco\\_breast\\_cancer.pdf](http://www.otru.org/pdf/special/expert_panel_tobacco_breast_cancer.pdf)).

Based on current research and common sense, breathing in smoke is harmful to one's body. I've heard the argument that this is an issue of choice—people can choose not to patronize establishments that allow smoking. However, what about the people who work in these establishments? Secondhand smoke exposure is an occupational risk to certain segments of the population—namely hospitality workers including musicians, servers, and bartenders. Many hospitality workers are women who are in the age group described by Dr. Glantz to whom secondhand smoke exposure is most dangerous—this may be you, your daughter, or a close friend. Secondhand smoke expo-

sure is a worker health issue. All people, no matter where they work, have the right to breathe clean air.

So, what can we do to protect ourselves and our families? According to the US Surgeon General, "eliminating smoking in indoor spaces fully protects nonsmokers from exposure to secondhand smoke. Separating smokers from nonsmokers, cleaning the air, and ventilating buildings cannot eliminate exposures of nonsmokers to secondhand smoke" (2006). Smoking bans are working across the nation with 74% of the US population currently covered by smoke free laws (Americans for Nonsmokers Rights Foundation). The Institute of Medicine reports that, "Indoor smoking bans lower the risk of heart attack, even among non-smokers." In South Carolina, 37 communities have passed smoke free ordinances covering 31.5% of the South Carolina population ([www.smokefreesc.org](http://www.smokefreesc.org)).

Growing up and living in the heart of tobacco country, I know this is a tough sell. However, the evidence is overwhelming, and our health is on the line. That makes the decision to ban smoking much easier. I am so thankful for all the restaurants in Florence County that are smoke free. A list of Florence's smoke free dining establishments can be found at [www.smokefreeflorence.org](http://www.smokefreeflorence.org).

It's hard to quit smoking—ask any former smoker. My advice is to never start in the first place. The nicotine and other chemicals in today's cigarettes are engineered to be some of the most addictive substances known in the world. Otherwise, with all this research about the harmful effects of smoking, why would people continue? I have witnessed family and friends struggle with this addiction, and I am so thankful that I never started smoking. I will continue to be diligent about avoiding secondhand smoke to protect myself and my children from one of the few dangers I can avoid.

If you are a smoker and ready to quit smoking, we can help. If you live in Florence County, call the South Carolina Quit Line at 1-800-QUIT-NOW. (1-800-784-8669) for free telephone counseling. For more information about Smoke Free Florence call Circle Park Prevention at 843-669-8087. Let's make Florence a cleaner, healthier place to live. Smoke Free Florence—make it happen!

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