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Smoking

Inhalation and exhalation of the fumes of burning tobacco. The dried leaves of the tobacco plant are smoked in a pipe or in cigar form, but mostly in cigarettes. At the beginning of the 21st century, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 1.3 billion people were smokers, more than four-fifths of whom lived in developing and transitional economy countries. Total annual world cigarette production, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, exceeded 5 trillion pieces, with China alone accounting for roughly 30 percent of the total.

Up to the 1940s smoking was considered harmless, but laboratory and clinical research subsequently proved that smoking greatly increases a smoker’s risk of dying from cancer and other diseases. By 2005 annual U.S. per capita adult consumption had fallen to 1716 cigarettes, down from a peak of 4345 in 1965. Legislation in many localities now bans or sharply restricts smoking in public places, cigarettes are heavily taxed, and the dangers of smoking have been widely publicized. Nevertheless, many young people and people of all ages continue to smoke. The American Cancer Society says that “smoking-related diseases remain the most preventable cause of death in our society.” See also World Almanac: Cigarette Use in the U.S.

History

European explorers arriving in the western hemisphere observed Native Americans smoking the leaves of the tobacco plant in pipes, and the practice was introduced into England in the mid-1500s. For centuries most tobacco was consumed by smoking pipes and cigars, by chewing, or as snuff. This pattern changed by the early 20th century, when American smokers were consuming more than 1000 cigarettes each annually. The general attitude of society was that smoking relieved tension and produced no ill effects. During World War II physicians endorsed sending soldiers
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