

Emphysema Death Rate Increasing

By **ROBERT STIVELMAN M.D.**, President, County Heart Association. If you have been hearing more about emphysema lately, it isn't because this disease has just been discovered. There is a much grimmer reason. In the last ten years

deaths from emphysema have increased six times over. More than 10,000 Americans die of it each year. This stark statistic is a piece of the overall picture of premature deaths—upwards of 100,000 a year—linked to cigarette smoking.

EMPHYSEMA, which is Greek for "inflation," is a disease that causes the lungs to become greatly enlarged. This condition often results in damage to the heart. How it attacks its victims, and why, is not completely clear. It doesn't develop suddenly or dramatically. The emphysema candidate has probably had several very

bad colds each winter for the past few years, each accompanied by a heavy cough, amounting often to chronic bronchitis. In most cases, he has been smoking heavily for most of his adult life. It is believed that emphysema is often a late after-effect of chronic infection or irritation of the bronchial tubes, or

bronchi, which connect the windpipe with the lungs. When these tubes become irritated, some of the airways may become obstructed or clogged up, trapping air in the blocked portion of the lung. Or the walls of the tiny air spaces may become torn. If infection or irritation is repeated for a long time, along with the stretching and destruction of the walls of the air spaces, the lungs as a whole may become over-stretched. In this condition, they are less efficient in handling the intake and outgo of air. Without treatment, the lungs may be permanently damaged. A day-in, day-out struggle to keep them working properly can develop. Every breath may require a major effort.

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passage of blood through the small vessels of the lung. As this interference builds up, the heart must work harder to pump blood. The heart may then enlarge because of this strain, and eventually give out entirely. While we do not know how to prevent emphysema, doctors can usually slow down the progress of the disease if patients are treated early. Different treatments, including antibiotics, help different patients at different times. Of special concern is prompt attention to recurrent respiratory infections. AND WITH respect both to the prevention and treatment of emphysema the word from the Los Angeles County Heart Association is: DON'T SMOKE.

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