

SAVING OUR PLANET OURSELVES & OUR LUNGS

Greta Thunberg, a Swedish schoolgirl, has recently been in the headlines having founded the school climate strikes movement. She is trying to open the eyes of those who are reluctant to see the harm that we appear to be doing to our Planet - a world in which she and her peers will have to live well beyond those who determine our present policies. Burning fossil fuels and releasing large quantities of carbon dioxide, as well as other pollutants, into the atmosphere is increasingly damaging our delicate eco-systems. Our leaders are either in complete denial or taking a rather 'traa dy liooar' approach to the problem.



Such an attitude, however, is not entirely new. Smoking started as something that people enjoyed during social activities, easing their anxiety and making them feel more relaxed. It then became an expanding daytime habit that proved difficult to give up. Companies and Governments, profiting directly or through increasing taxation, were not keen to heed the health warnings for quite some time. Even now, we are only nibbling away at the problem of tobacco addiction, with a legacy of individuals suffering the consequences.

One of the major health hazards of tobacco smoke is that it contains carcinogens, particularly for lung cancer - one of the commoner cancers and presently the leading cause of cancer deaths. The disease often develops in individuals who often already have chest symptoms due to their habit. It is therefore important for such individuals to be alert to any change in their symptoms.

The early symptoms of lung cancer include:

- a cough that doesn't go away after two or three weeks
- a long-standing cough that gets worse
- persistent chest infections
- coughing up blood
- an ache or pain when breathing or coughing
- persistent breathlessness
- loss of appetite, unexplained weight loss or lack of energy

Lung cancer can be treated successfully if caught early. Smokers often delay going to their Doctor through a sense of guilt of having brought the disease on themselves. Such a stigma is also the reason why funding of research into this major killer is not what it should be. We cannot relive our past and although we may have regrets, stepping forward and seeking medical advice early will lead to a more certain future.

Pollutants associated with vehicle emissions have recently been shown to be associated with an increase in lung cancer in non-smokers – dirty air is equivalent to smoking one cigarette a day. Greta Thunberg, by succeeding with her mission, may not only help clean up our atmosphere for the benefit of the whole natural world but also prevent many from developing lung cancer in the future.



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