

Drawing attention to the eyes

Many know smoking can cause a myriad health of issues, but a professor at the University of Waterloo's optometry school says few know it can lead to eye disease

Johanna Weidner

WATERLOO — The serious and potentially deadly health risks of smoking are widely known. But there's one part of the body also prone to disease from smoking that's often overlooked — the eyes.

"The public are pretty knowledgeable that smoking has health problems associated with it," said Marlee Spafford, a professor at the University of Waterloo's optometry school.

Most smokers know about the dangers of getting lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart attack and stroke.

"They rarely know that it causes eye disease," Spafford said.

Educating people about the link between eye disease and smoking should be part of a regular eye exam, yet Spafford found in her recent pilot study that smoking habits and the dangers were not routinely discussed by optometrists with their patients.

Spafford and several colleagues surveyed optometrists and optometry students about their attitudes and behaviours around talking to patients about smoking and quitting.

While an optometrist usually asks a patient about smoking habits — mostly if they smoke and how much — little information is offered about the risks.

"They may not say anything to the smoking patient who has no signs of eye disease yet," Spafford said.

Smoking can have catastrophic effects on the eyes.

Age-related macular degeneration, which causes deterioration of the central part of the retina and destroys central vision,



Warning

Cigarette smoking can cause catastrophic damage to your eyes.



While many people know about the deadly health risks of smoking, fewer people know about the dangers it poses to vision, says a professor at University of Waterloo's optometry school.

has several risk factors, but not all are uncontrollable like age.

"The No. 1 preventable risk is smoking," Spafford said.

Also, smoking increases the chances of cataracts and other eye problems that can greatly diminish a person's vision and, as a result, their quality of life.

Other health care providers — doctors, nurses, pharmacists, dentists — routinely counsel patients about the health risks of smoking. And so should optometrists, Spafford said.

"Optometrists are primary care practitioners, so they can't just think within the eye," she said. "They also look at eye health."

Health issues affect the eyes, such as diabetes leading to vision impairment and blindness.

Optometrists can have a preventive role to warn people about the risks and discuss quitting before a person suffers any ill effects.

"This is a great opportunity," Spafford said.

She and her fellow researchers, which included another optometrist, nursing professor and psychology researcher, want to follow up with a national study to see what's happening across Canada. Spafford hopes to make recommendations for student training and continuing education for practising professionals to teach how to have conversations with patients about smoking and smoking-cessation tools.

"Optometry is awakening to this as an important role," said Spafford, adding that the study now being written up for publishing is likely the first of its kind in Canada.

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Ellie advice

Offer apology for meddling

Q. My brother-in-law and his wife both began dating others post-divorce; their young sons had a hard time with it. A year ago, we were expecting our first child and my brother-in-law began seriously dating a woman no one in the family liked.

He talked about moving away, getting married and having more children. His children were acting out, expressing anger, etc.

I felt compelled to call his girlfriend: I left her a voice mail message indicating that her relationship with my brother-in-law was hurting the rest of the family, that his children hadn't yet adjusted to the divorce and it would be best if she left the situation. It probably wasn't my place to speak directly to this woman.

They're no longer together, however, my limited relationship with my brother-in-law is now non-existent and my husband and he have limited contact. I'm upset that we can't move forward and that my brother-in-law's made no effort to see his nephew.

I've attempted to mend bridges. For my husband's sake, I'd like to make this situation better but I'm sure that my brother-in-law doesn't see how his actions affected the family.

A. There's meddling and then there's muddling whole relationships. You have done both. Since you had serious concerns for your nephews, you should've taken them to both his parents in a helpful way. People going through divorce already know their kids are feeling the impact — the adults and their children need guidance, the love and support of extended family and counselling when needed.

Calling this woman was rude and intrusive. And your added selfish motive proves it.

You owe your brother-in-law a sincere apology even though your interest in his kids was valid. You negatively affected a whole family just as much as he once did.

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There is an Olympian in all of us if we're willing to put in the effort

These past two weeks, world-class athletes have been keeping us glued to our television sets. It is unbelievable how they have trained their bodies for their particular sport. They sometimes appear to be superhuman!

These athletes demonstrate how we can push our bodies physically and mentally. They prove to us that perseverance and hard work get results.

There is an Olympian in all of us. We just need to realize that. Let these amazing athletes inspire you to take up a new sport, perfect one you already take part in or just simply get more active.

It really doesn't matter if you are young or old, active or inactive — the fitness challenge is the same for all of us.

Eating healthy and working out are tough for everyone, including the Olympic athlete. Losing weight, getting fit or changing unhealthy habits requires sticking to a disciplined plan. An Olym-



MARLA ARNDT fitness bootcamp

pian must stick to a strict training program. If you want to get results, you will have to do the same.

Since the 2010 Games began, I have noticed an increase in motivation, focus and energy with my own fitness regimen, as well as my clients'. So I asked all of them the same question: "Have the Olympic athletes inspired you to push harder?" The answer for all has been an absolute "Yes," followed by, "If they can do what they do, I can try a little harder. I want to see what I am capable of."

If watching these amazing athletes perform has ignited a fire in you to get healthier, follow these two simple tips.



BORIS MINKEVICH, THE CANADIAN PRESS, FILE

Canada's Ivan Babikov skis during the men's cross country 4x10K relay classic/free on Wednesday in Whistler, B.C.

Build a Foundation
Depending upon what your current fitness level is, it can take as long as six weeks to build a solid fitness base.

This period involves slowly

building endurance, strength, flexibility and cardiovascular conditioning.

Start your training program with slow, steady aerobic sessions and light weight lifting.

Eat Right

Olympic athletes know how to eat and drink for sports performance and recovery. To exercise consistently, you need to provide a good supply of high-quality energy to your working muscles. The easiest way to do this is to eat a balanced breakfast and continue eating a variety of high-quality foods throughout the day. Depending upon the type and duration of workout you do, you'll want to eat a small snack and drink water a half-hour before you get going.

No matter what type of workout you choose, one of the most important lessons we can learn from our Olympic athletes is dedication. Commit to reach your own personal best — and then believe.

Guelph-based personal trainer Marla Arndt owns and operates Frameworks Fitness Studio. She can be reached via her website at www.frameworksfitness.com. Her column appears every other week.

ZOOM **in**

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