NEUROLOGY NEWS

Multiple Sclerosis and Smoking Risk

e've known for decades about the non-neurologic risk for smoking—heart disease, lung disease, cancer," says Barbara S. Giesser, M.D., clinical director of the MS program at the University of California in Los Angeles. "Now we have evidence that it may adversely affect the course of MS." And while scientists don't know exactly how smoking promotes the onset and progression of disease, the detrimental effects are indisputable.

Research shows that smokers have a 40- to 80-percent higher risk of developing MS than non-smokers. "The more you smoke, the greater the risk," says Alberto Ascherio, M.D., professor of epidemi-

ology and nutrition at Harvard School of Public Health and associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School.

But smoking doesn't only affect the onset of MS; it also impacts the progression of the disease. Smokers are twice as likely to develop full MS from a clinically isolated event (a one-time episode of tingling or numbness) than nonsmokers. And research from Harvard School of Public Health shows that smokers are three times more likely to change from a relapsing/remitting course of MS to a secondary

progressive course compared to people who never smoked.

Perhaps the most interesting research linking smoking and MS came from a 2007 study in the journal *Brain* that explicitly links the onset of MS before the age of 16 to childhood exposure to secondhand smoke. The longer the child was exposed to secondhand smoke, the more likely they were to develop MS. In the study, 62 percent of the 129 MS patients had been exposed to their parents' secondhand cigarette smoke during childhood compared to only 45.1 percent of healthy children.

Nevertheless, there's some controversy about whether smoking later in life increases the chances of developing MS. One study published in the *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology* found that the chances of getting MS among early smokers (between the ages of 11 and 45) is nearly three times higher than the chances of getting MS among smokers who started smoking after age 45.

"People who start smoking at younger ages tend to smoke for a longer period of time and smoke more," says Dr. Ascherio. "But that doesn't mean that smoking at a later age doesn't increase the risk of MS. Smoking is associated with a higher risk of MS, regardless of when you start." —Amy Paturel, M.S., M.P.H.

NEUROBIC ANSWERS FROM P. 9: 1: An apple a day keeps the doctor away; 2: Silence is golden; 3: A picture is worth a thousand words; 4: I'm all ears; 5: Too many chefs spoil the broth; 6: Not my cup of tea; 7: What goes up must come down; 8: Bring home the bacon; 9: Look before you leap.



SCREENING ROOM

HBO Documents Life with Alzheimer's Disease

ccording to 2009 data from the Alzheimer's Assocation, one out of eight people age 65 or older has Alzheimer's disease (AD), and an estimated 500,000 Americans under age 65 have AD or another dementia. Most live at home—70 percent, in fact—and are cared for by friends and family. By 2050, the number of Americans living with AD is expected to triple, growing to as many as 16 million.

Considering how many Americans are likely to be living with AD soon, there is no better time than the present to educate people and raise funds for research.

That's where the new, four-part HBO documentary series steps in. *The Alzheimer's Project* debuted on Sunday, May 10. The first segment, called "The Memory Loss Tapes," tells the stories of seven individuals with AD—from their point of view—as their dementia progresses. The three other segments in the series are "Grandpa, Do You Know Who I Am? with Maria Shriver" (designed for children); "Caregivers"; and "Momentum in Science"—an insightful report of the cutting-edge research advances in understanding, treating, and preventing AD.

If there is any misconception the producers want to address in the documentary, it is to rectify the false belief that there is no hope for AD. "That's just not true," series producer John Hoffman says. "There is tremendous public anxiety that there's nothing we can do—and that if you have someone in your family affected by Alzheimer's, you are also at great risk. But genetics do not show that. We feel good about bringing this kind of information to the public." —*Elizabeth Stump*

The Alzheimer's Project is presented by HBO Documentary Films and the National Institute on Aging at the National Institutes of Health in association with the Alzheimer's Association, Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund, and Geoffrey Beene Gives Back Alzheimer's Initiative. All films will stream free of charge on HBO.com and will be available on DVD starting June 2.