

Scientific Review

Incense Damages Lungs

“Inhaling incense smoke may cause respiratory dysfunction, allergies, allergic contact dermatitis, growths and tumors, and genetic mutations.”

Scientists have documented evidence that incense is harmful to human health.

Incense is popular in Asian countries. It is common for the Buddhism and Taoism religions to burn incense daily.

In the United States, incense is often sold in health food stores and used for religious purposes or scenting a room. However, incense is dangerous to health according to scientists.

Lin and colleagues, the researchers who studies incense, state that “a typical composition of stick incense consists of 21% (by weight) of herbal and wood powder, 35% of fragrance material, 11% of adhesive powder, and 33% of bamboo stick.”

Lin advises people to reduce exposure time to incense and ventilated areas where it is burned, citing that “The air pollution in and around various temples has been documented to be harmful effects on health.”

Like any cigarette smoke and wood smoke, incense smoke contains particulate matter, gas products (carbon monoxide, cardi dioxide, and sulfur dioxide) and other organic compounds (benzene, tolu-

ene, xylenes, aldehydes and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons) shown to harm human health.

Incense burning produces over 4 times more particulate matter than cigarette smoke.

According to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, toluene can cause headaches, confusion, and memory loss. Xylenes can cause headaches, lack of muscle coordination, dizziness, confusion, and changes in one's sense of balance, irritation of the skin, eyes, nose, and throat; and difficulty in breathing.

Inhaling incense smoke may cause respiratory dysfunction, allergies, allergic contact dermatitis, growths and tumors, and genetic mutations.

As allergies and chemical sensitivities are on the rise, many yoga studios have looked for alternatives to incense and restrict the wearing of scent to class. Some safer alternatives include natural potpourri and fresh flowers.

However the best scent of all is plain fresh air!

Reference

Lin TC, Krishnaswamy G, Chi DS. Incense smoke: clinical, structural and molecular effects on airway disease. *Clin Mol Allergy*. 2008 Apr 25;6(1):3.

