

# SMOKE IF YOU WANT

An answer to  
**Lieut. Comdr. Gene Tunney**



**By Dr. Louis E. Bisch**

**"I believe in smoking. As a doctor I recommend it. I claim tobacco is one of the greatest boons ever given to mankind."**

Smoking has been maligned long enough! It's been the whipping boy of health fanatics for years. It is high time somebody took up cudgels in its defense!

Three weeks ago an obviously disturbed patient entered my office.

"I've just read an article by Gene Tunney on smoking," he said. "Tunney says smoking affects your vitality, shortens your life and knocks you out before your time."

"All right. Why the excitement?" I replied. My patient shook a finger:

"Because—well—you're supposed to be treating me for nerves, aren't you? I smoke a pack a day, every day. According to Tunney, since I'm already 48, I'd better buy myself a cemetery plot. According to his *Nicotine Knockout* story, I've only 12 more years to live. What I want to know is why you didn't tell me to stop smoking?"

"I don't agree with Tunney, that's all," was my answer.

Had I thrown ice water in the man's face, he could not have looked more surprised. He stared at me for several seconds. "But Doc," he pleaded, "Tunney is an ex-champ. He's training the boys in the Navy. He quotes statistics and scientists."

But statistics are tricky. By careful selection and compilation, almost any conclusion may be found.

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... There is a mental side to smoking, the side that no good doctor neglects nowadays even when he treats a physical ailment . . .

**I believe in smoking. As a doctor, I recommend it. I claim tobacco is one of the greatest boons ever given to mankind.**

I am astonished at Tunney's bad timing in advising a nation, warned repeatedly to become toughened for war, to send its sons "instead of cigarettes, a baseball mitt or a set of boxing gloves." The Lieutenant Commander apparently is unaware that we are fighting, not for a world series pennant or a world's heavyweight championship, but for the American way of life.

Significantly, perhaps, the former heavyweight champion of the world follows with:

"If you think this sounds goody-goody, take a look at my companions in the non-smoking section," and then he names the late Knute Rockne, William Muldoon and Ty Cobb as proof, apparently, that smoking is completely no good.

The facts, Commander, are that the boys in uniform and in the factories are not there to train for football, baseball or the prize ring. They are being conditioned for war—a total war in which mental conditioning is every whit as important as physical conditioning.

In the last analysis, what the fighting men of today need even more than physical perfection is an alert mentality. Mechanized warfare, the airplane, and the parachute largely do away with long marches and the dangers from excessive fatigue. The war will not be won by physical supermen but by the preponderance and superiority of equipment and the brains to use it effectively. No correlation exists between brain and brawn. **The biggest and bravest things are often done, not by muscular giants, but by small, often even weak, people.**

But did you ever see shell-shocked soldiers in the last war? Have you ever observed the quieting effect of a cigarette? From a hospital bed, from even an operating table, the cry that invariably rose was, "Nurse! Please, nurse, give me a cigarette."

And note this well! The outstanding leaders of the Allied Nations are, for the most part, over sixty and they smoke. President Roosevelt is 60. He smokes cigarettes. Winston Churchill, 68, is seldom seen with-

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**. . . If a person is fool enough to keep on when his system warns him to go slow or stop—well, that's his own lookout! . . .**

out his cigar. Cordell Hull, a smoker, is 70. General Knudsen, 63, and Admiral Hart, 65, both smoke. (Incidentally, Hitler, Hirohito and Mussolini don't.)

Other smokers may be mentioned—Sir Stafford Cripps, 53; Chiang Kai-shek, 56; Donald Nelson, 53. None of these gentlemen, superlatively alert and active, gives the impression that he will pass out before 60.

Tobacco is habit-forming—granted. The habitual smoker feels ill at ease when deprived of his weed. But what of that? You also feel wobbly when you don't eat or take fluids or sleep. I am not intimating, of course, that tobacco is a food. But I do claim that **individual differences** exist as to the **amount** of smoking best for you (what is toxic for one produces no effect on another); secondly, that the poisonous effects so widely heralded (especially the nicotine content) are of little or no importance because **tolerance for tobacco** (within reasonable, common sense limits) is soon established; thirdly, that smoking in moderation and according to your individual differences, not only does you no harm, but actually can do you a lot of good by making your life more tolerable and happy.

No, I haven't much use for statistics. I mistrust them. Listen, for example, to these two sets. For the first 8 months of the fiscal year, 1942, over 144 billion cigarettes were consumed in the United States, nearly 4 billion cigars and thousands of pounds of snuff, pipe and chewing tobacco. What's more, for the same period, cigarettes were up 18 per cent over the previous year. And yet! During the last two decades the average human has added seven and one-quarter years to his life.

Now then, do these figures prove that the use of tobacco actually prolongs life? At first glance it would seem that they might. But they're no more conclusive than the remark made by Sir Armand Marc Ruffer when, after dissecting many Egyptian mummies and finding hardening of the arteries almost as prevalent among them as among Europeans of his time, he stated that whatever the cause of their arteriosclerosis, it certainly was not tobacco.

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The point is that you should not make definite deductions unless many factors—preferably all the factors—are taken into consideration. Perhaps it's the earlier medical recognition of disease that keeps us alive longer these days, or the advances made in treatment, or our improved hygienic living conditions, or better balanced diets. It may well be that these reasons for longevity—and there are others—help to counteract the alleged pernicious effects of smoking. If so, that's fine.

Perhaps, on the other hand, if we did not smoke so much we would gain even more from the longevity factors and each of us would reach at least 80. That hypothesis, however, likewise would be tenable if there were no poverty, no economic insecurity for the future, less mental and physical strain and no world war. Anybody can keep on running around the mulberry bush like this and argue himself into a dizzy spin if he has a liking for statistical data.

When you attempt to rely on statistics it is not only the number of individuals examined that matters. (Commander Tunney quotes Dr. Raymond Pearl, of Johns Hopkins University, as having studied 100,000 cases). More important is the selection of those individuals. In this respect, Dr. Pearl's figures carry a weakness. The only thing his cases had in common was the fact that they all used tobacco.

Commander Tunney's quotations (from Dr. Pearl) do not state how many of these people suffered from pneumonia or cancer, infectious diseases like syphilis or typhoid, how many had liver or kidney trouble, how many were chronic or heavy drinkers, etc.

According to the Commander, Dr. Pearl "found that among 100,000 heavy (over ten cigarettes a day) smokers, 53,774 die before the age of 60. Among the same number of nonsmokers, only 43,436 die before that age." But is a 10,000 difference so great after all? And who knows but what among the dead-before-sixty more were killed by such diseases as I have listed (which have no connection whatever with the use of tobacco) than by "dat ole debil" nicotine that Commander Tunney seems to abhor so much.

Indeed, in his book *Biology of Death*, Dr. Raymond Pearl, although he does not deal specifically with nicotine, draws conclusions which make pointless the quotations used by Commander Tunney regarding tobacco and longevity. Dr. Pearl says, for example, that in all forms of physical breakdown (from charts on breakdowns in reference to kidneys, general circulation, sex, nerves, skeletal structure and musculature, alimentary tract and the building up and breaking down processes known as metabolism, etc.) men and women may have trouble from as early an age as 15 on. Such pathological changes begin to increase from the beginning of middle life to its end, while after that the breakdown is more rapid. Dr. Pearl also adds that men, around 45, are in many cases particularly subject to respiratory breakdowns because of their occupations. So you see that people grow old rapidly whether or not they smoke.

No one could, to be sure, criticize Dr. Pearl's findings as such. It is only the conclusion drawn from them that I reject. Tunney, using these statistics as a basis for his



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article against tobacco, goes on to say that "Even if you smoke **moderately**, you have much less chance of reaching 60 than if you don't smoke at all. It's a slow count, but it gets you finally."

To that last statement—bosh. It may be said in general that **smoking results in no apparent physical injury to any person who is in sound health**. Even smoking to excess produces no more than a functional trouble (increased heart and breathing rate, palpitation, shortness of breath, indigestion) which disappears when the tobacco intake is reduced or cut entirely. If a person is fool infectious diseases like syphilis or typhoid, how many had liver or kidney trouble, how many were chronic or heavy drinkers, etc.

**M**en and women exist, however, who have what doctors call an "idiosyncrasy" for tobacco. For some, even smelling smoke may produce headaches, dizziness, or nausea. Tobacco, for them, is therefore taboo. Incidentally, that is true of milk for many. It would be ridiculous if it were maintained, therefore, that milk is injurious to health. The same holds true for tobacco.

Let me review briefly what the **excessive** use of tobacco—mind you, not the **moderate**, the **tolerant** use, according to one's individual differences from others—is said to do to the organic, the physical system.

(1) Does **nicotine** injure health? In the *American Journal of Pharmacy*, the result of a study of 150 male smokers revealed that there is no toxic effect because individual tolerance is soon established; that nicotine intake via smoking does not tend to reduce weight; and that congestion of the pharynx is almost the sole possible ill result.

(2) Concerning the raising of **blood pressure**. Dr. W. M. Johnson, in a painstaking research, which appeared in the *American Journal of Pharmacy*, on 150 regular daily smokers as compared to 150 nonsmokers (taking at least 20 in each decade of

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life from age 20 to 60 and all free from any acute disease, valvular heart disorder, tuberculosis, syphilis, or deformity) found that the use of tobacco raised neither the systolic nor the diastolic pressure.

### (3) What about angina pectoris?

It is this distressing form of heart disease that so many people claim is due to smoking and which can carry off an individual pronto. It has been found by medical scientists that tobacco in this respect is by no means the villain it usually is thought to be. *Science Digest* for July, 1941, states that smoking does **not** tend to produce angina. *Science News Letter* for November, 1940, says that in considering this influence of tobacco on heart disease, factors such as heredity, the individual's manner of living and doing things, his emotional temperament, must be taken into account.

(4) In reference to the **contraction of peripheral (skin) blood vessels** (and concerning which the Tunney article makes quite a point). This circulatory phenomenon has long been held to be a direct result of nicotine. Doctor Israel Shulman and Doctor Michael G. Mulinos of Columbia University told the American Physiological Society that smoking did no more or less harm than deep breathing. They gave seventeen men standard and denicotinized cigarettes. They then told these men to take 10 deep breaths—with exactly the same result. From which these scientists concluded that nicotine is a minor factor in producing contraction of peripheral blood vessels.

(5) As to the **claim that smoking produces cancer** of the mouth, tongue, larynx or lungs, prevailing medical opinion is to the contrary. The New York Department of Health announced in 1934 that their studies showed no increase in mortality from these cancers to correspond with the enormous post-war increase in the consumption of cigarettes. They even found a decrease in mortality rate among women since their smoking became more prevalent.

(6) **Does the use of tobacco make you nervous?** This depends on your tolerance and the amount used. Nervous people tend to smoke to excess **because they are nervous**. Tobacco does not make them so.

(7) **Stomach ulcers?** There is no scientific evidence to suppose that habitual smokers predispose to stomach and intestinal ulcer.

(8) **Does tobacco stunt your growth?** Again the answer is "No." College men and women are at least one inch taller than they were in the last generation.

(9) **What is Buerger's Disease?** Its symptoms are constriction of the peripheral vessels in the hands and feet which tend to gangrene. Tobacco cannot be accused of causing this rare disease. The worst one can say is that tobacco seems to have a predisposing and precipitating effect.

(10) In reference to the **effect of smoking upon your wind**, it may be

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said that smoking affects it only when you are engaged in strenuous exercise, and when a considerable number of cigarettes are used, and when exercise is taken directly after smoking.

Commander Tunney says: "This powerful poison is the source of all the pleasure derived from smoking." And, of course, he means nicotine. And he admits, too, that "you do get a 'lift' when you light a cigarette. "But," he adds, "it's exactly like the lift you get from cocaine, heroin, marijuana. All these things can stimulate the adrenals, cause a momentary increase of sugar in the blood."

**A**ll true, Commander. And why not? If that's the way the body works, what's the harm? Many things give a lift besides narcotic drugs—a glass of orange juice. **Although nicotine is technically classified as a poison, it's the amount absorbed that makes the difference.** A small amount that only stimulates is harmless. Suppose stored-up sugar is released from the liver and muscles—what of that? Most of the nicotine and tarry products are destroyed in the combustion of the cigarette anyway. Nicotine poisoning as such only occurs in heavy smokers who go beyond their tolerance levels habitually. Even the rather recently discovered vitamins are harmful if taken regularly in overdoses. A poison is "any substance that the body cannot eliminate fast enough to avoid interference with essential body functions."

**Watch, however, your tendency to smoke to excess as you would watch a tendency to overdo anything. Don't smoke carelessly.**

Commander Tunney's article deals primarily with the **excessive** use of tobacco; also with the **possible** evil effects that such excesses may produce upon the **organic** system. It is based upon interpretation of statistical data through which anyone can drive a horse and wagon. Actually, the use of tobacco seems never to be a specific cause of any ills to which flesh is heir.

**But there is a mental side to smoking,** the side that no good doctor neglects nowadays even when he treats for a physical ailment.

The day I started writing this article I read the following in the *New York Times*. It came direct from United States Army Headquarters out in Australia and it seems a fitting conclusion.

"Today's conference, which took place in the Army Headquarters press room, lasted an hour and a half. At its beginning General MacArthur strode in with an aide and took a chair facing a semicircle of reporters. . . . he was not seated long.

"As he paced he talked almost continuously. His voice took on dramatic tones as he spoke. . . . The room was hot and badly ventilated

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and it became so full of tobacco smoke that many started coughing. Thereupon one of his aides asked that the smoking be stopped and even the General obeyed the injunction for a spell. In the hour and a half he smoked five cigarettes."

That soldier, who smokes like a chimney, is, you will recall, the idol of America today!



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**CLICK**

May, 1942