



MGH Tobacco Treatment Service

(617) 726-7443

Smoking and Carbon Monoxide

WHAT IS CARBON MONOXIDE?

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless, highly poisonous gas that is harmful to your body at high concentrations. CO is produced from burning material including cigarettes or other tobacco products. Since there is CO in the air, everyone has some exposure to this gas.

WHY MEASURE CARBON MONOXIDE?

If you are a smoker, you will have an increased amount of carbon monoxide in your body. The more of this poisonous gas you have in your blood stream, the less oxygen the blood can carry. This can result in a strain on the body, particularly the heart and brain.

The amount of carbon monoxide in your lungs now is _____ ppm.

WHAT DOES THIS NUMBER MEAN?

The meter measures the Carbon Monoxide in parts per million (ppm.)

Non-smoker	0-6 ppm
Loss of oxygen to heart, brain, etc.	20 ppm
Urban "Air Pollution Emergency" Alert	50 ppm
Headaches, nausea, can't think clearly	60-150 ppm

The amount of carbon monoxide in smokers changes, depending on the time of last cigarette, brand smoked, number of cigarettes smoked, and how deeply smokers inhale. Carbon monoxide reduces the amount of oxygen in the red blood cells and makes the heart work harder to circulate the oxygen. Carbon monoxide also makes the blood thicker and increases the tendency to clot. Heavy smokers may lose as much as 15% of their oxygen carrying capacity. High levels of carbon monoxide can lead to confusion, collapse, unconsciousness, seizures, brain damage, or death.

WHAT IF YOU STOP SMOKING?

Now the good news! If you quit smoking, your Carbon Monoxide level will return to normal in 24-48 hours! Consider the benefits of becoming a NON- SMOKER!