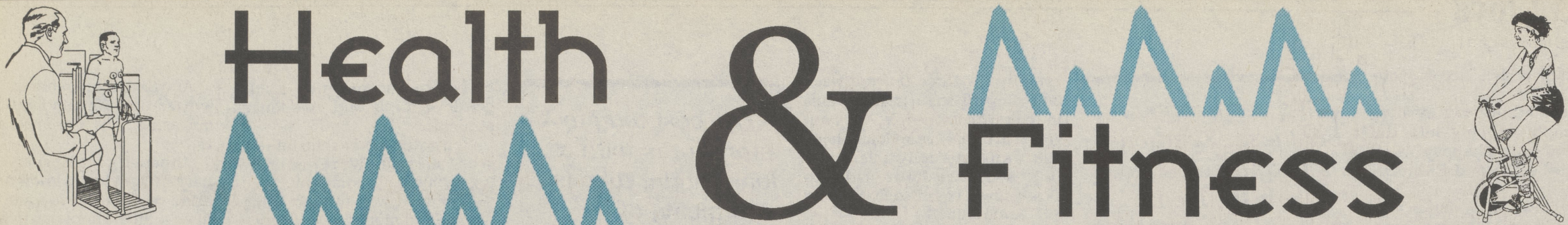
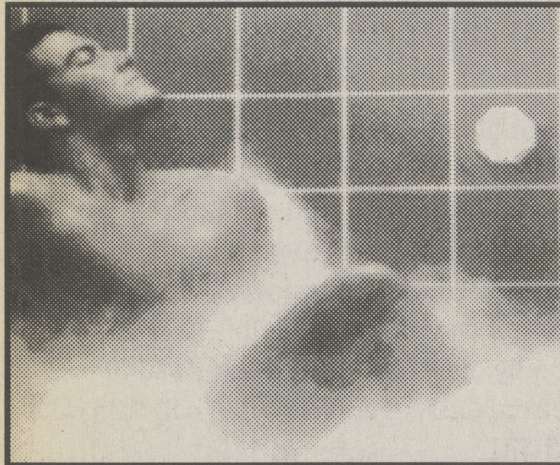


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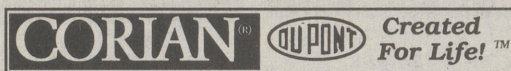


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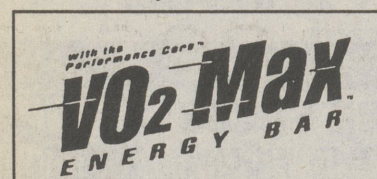


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Smoking is major health issue for women

BY WILLIAM C. ANDREWS, M.D.,
President
The American College of
Obstetricians and Gynecologists

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Many health issues today are debatable, but smoking is not one of them. There is no question that smoking is the single largest preventable cause of disease and death in the United States. Women who smoke can shorten their lives by five to eight years.

This is sobering information. And it leads to the obvious question of why women smoke. Surprisingly, one of the main reasons is that they don't know the risks of smoking. More than 40 percent of Americans don't know that smoking causes lung cancer and another 30 percent don't know that smoking doubles the risk of heart attack.

As teenagers, many girls are first drawn to smoking, and even if they are aware of the risks, these diseases seem far away. Instead, these young women see the habit as glamorous and get pulled into it by friends who smoke and think it's cool. On top of that, children who have parents who smoke are twice as likely to light up as those whose parents don't smoke.

Once they get started smoking, many women become physically addicted to cigarettes. They become dependent upon the nicotine that gets into their bloodstream with each cigarette. Other women get hooked because they find smoking eases stress and anxiety.

But even if it makes them feel good temporarily, smoking is exceedingly dangerous. Smoking can cause chronic lung disease including emphysema; various cancers including lung cancer, cancer of the mouth, larynx, esophagus, pancreas and bladder; heart disease; and complications during pregnancy including miscarriage, stillbirth and low birth weight babies.

The good news is that the benefits of quitting start to accrue almost immediately. You will breathe easier, be relieved of chronic coughing and have fewer and less severe colds. Ten to 15 years after quitting, a former smoker's risk of lung cancer returns to that of a non-smoker.

To break the habit, make sure you set realistic goals and tell friends in order to get their support. Many people get help by attending nonsmoking programs, through counseling, hypnosis and use of a nicotine patch.

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