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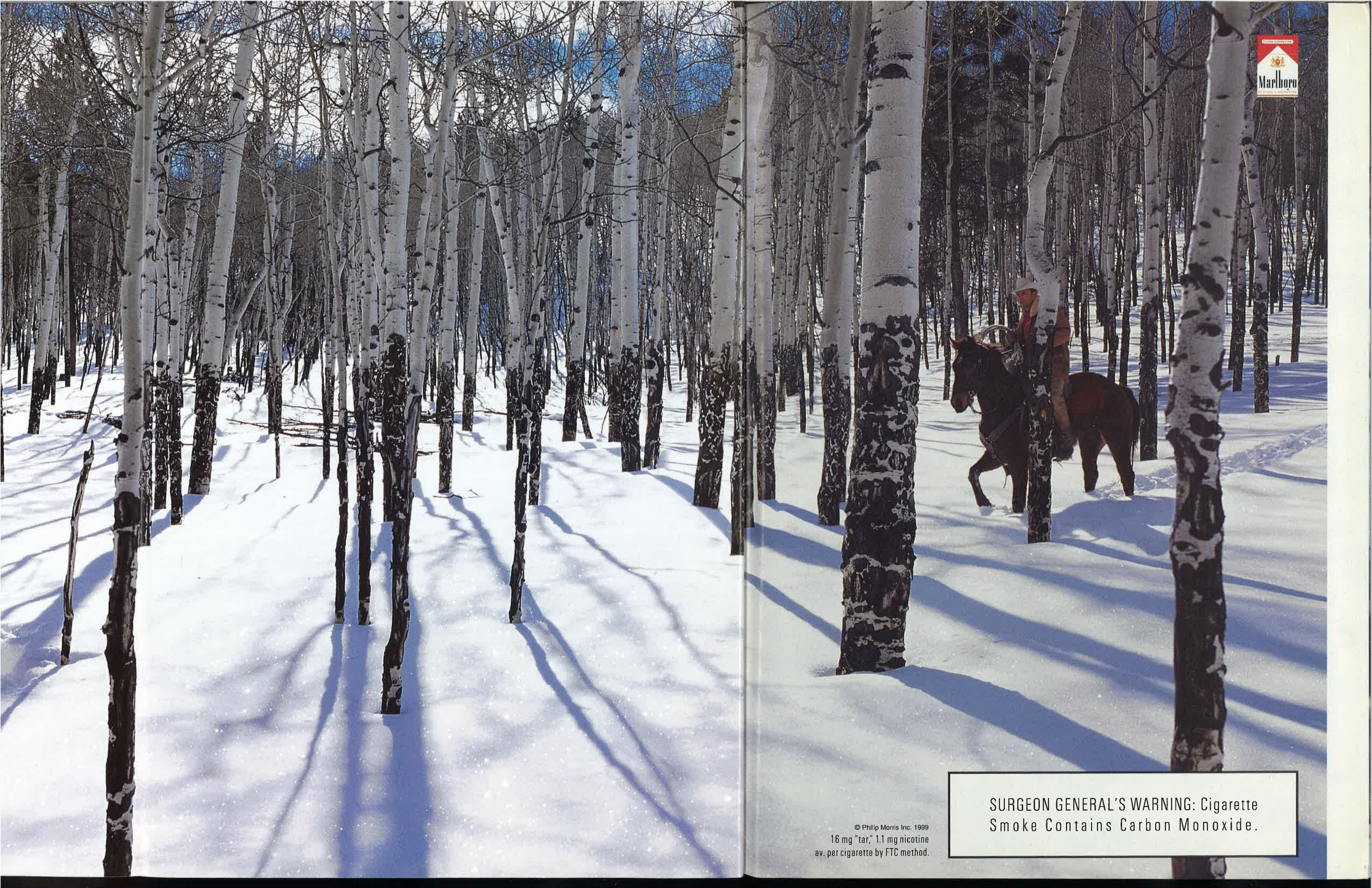


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SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Cigarette  
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© Philip Morris Inc. 1999  
16 mg "tar," 1.1 mg nicotine  
av. per cigarette by FTC method.

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BURN



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**SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Quitting Smoking  
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SINCE 1913

# The Scary Truth About Social Smoking

Warning: Even a puff or two on the weekends puts your health at risk



What's the harm in a few drags with your drink? You'd be surprised

ELISABETH FENNELL DOESN'T SMOKE—MUCH. SHE LIGHTS up only when she's out with friends. And even then, it's only a cigarette or two. Maybe three. The 28-year-old New York City editor never craves a smoke, nor does she experience withdrawal symptoms when she goes a few days without one, so she's never considered herself addicted.

Fennell's among a growing number of "social smokers"—young women who light up at least once every week, but not as often as every day. Like most such women, she doesn't think the occasional cigarette can hurt her. She's wrong.

## Playing with Fire?

Fennell and other social smokers insist that their smoking is nothing more than an occasional what-the-hell habit. But surveys show that around 70 percent of people who experiment with smoking become regular puffers. And there's evidence that your risk for lung cancer is based more on the total number of years you smoke than the number of cigarettes you go through per day. Although no long-term studies have been able to pin down the specific health risks of smoking fewer than ten cigarettes

a week, smoking experts like David Burns, M.D., a professor at the University of California, San Diego, believe it's comparable to long-term exposure to secondhand smoke. In other words, your risk of cancer, heart disease, DNA damage and breathing disorders could increase by 20 percent or more.

While the number of American adults who smoke daily has remained stable (at about a quarter of the population) since 1992, research suggests that social smoking may be on the rise. Some experts estimate that one fifth of adults who smoke are non-daily smokers. A recent study at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, found that the number of students who smoked socially increased 63 percent in just two years.

## If It's Pot You're Puffing

You may think you're doing your body a favor if you **steer clear of Marlboros and light up a joint instead**. Indeed, in a study at the University of California at Los Angeles, heavy pot smokers showed no evidence of the lung disease emphysema, while heavy tobacco smokers did. But, says researcher Donald Tashkin, M.D.: "If you **compare one cigarette to one joint**, the joint is more harmful in terms of lung cancer risk." Why? Marijuana smoke contains many of the toxins found in cigarettes, such as tar (which contains carcinogens) and carbon monoxide (which can lead to cardiovascular disease). Worse: Joints are unfiltered, and pot smokers hold the smoke in their lungs an average of four times longer than tobacco smokers—so they take in **four times as much tar and carbon monoxide**, Dr. Tashkin has found. (In fact, for people who smoke two or three joints a day, DNA damage in white blood cells—a possible precursor to cancer—is close to the amount detected in people who smoke 15 cigarettes a day, according to research at the University of Texas.) Finally, pot's main chemical, THC, interferes with the lungs' ability to ward off infection and protect against tumor growth.

## It's Not Just a Drag—It's a Drug

What could be causing the surge? For one thing, there's a subtle social pressure to smoke. Elisabeth Fennell says that most of her close friends smoke, which makes it even tougher to resist having a few cigarettes when she's hanging out with them at their favorite bar.

But there are also physiological factors that make smoking attractive. For some, the occasional cigarette may serve as a mood-lifter, according to John Rosecrans, Ph.D., professor of pharmacology and toxicology at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. Studies show that nicotine, the same cigarette component that's so bad for your lungs, temporarily increases your levels of the feel-good brain chemicals serotonin and dopamine. The key word here is "temporarily": To maintain that chemical high, Dr. Rosecrans calculates that you'd have to puff on a cigarette about every five minutes. (So the minute you stop inhaling, the effect wears off.)

Add alcohol to the mix—a typical social-smoking scenario—and the potential for mood modification becomes even more potent. "Alcohol is a sedative, which counteracts the stimulant effects of nicotine," explains Thomas Markham Brown, M.D., a psychiatrist in Gautier, Mississippi, who studies the effects of drugs on the human brain. "Combining the two causes a relaxed high." And relaxing may make you reach for yet another cigarette. Young women are particularly susceptible to such psychological lures, says Harvard researcher Karen Emmons, Ph.D., who has studied smoking behaviors in college students.

Social smoking's very casualness is part of what makes it so dangerous: It *seems* practically risk-free, compared with a pack-a-day habit. But you could become addicted. And even if you light up only on weekends, you could eventually learn the hard way that—as far as your health is concerned—where there's smoke, there's fire.

► **mLle.Link** How much did Big Tobacco know about the health hazards of smoking, anyway? The information at <http://galen.library.ucsf.edu/tobacco/> will make you gasp.

ELLEN STRASSER/STYLING; EDITOR: JACQUELYNNE JOHNSON; HAIR AND MAKEUP BY LORNAINE ABRELES FOR VUE 2; LOCATION: ICE BAR, NYC; FROM LEFT: XXXXX JEANS; TOP: RALPH LAUREN; SHIRT: OMO; SHIRT: MAMALI TOP



Box Kings, 16 mg. "tar", 1.2 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method. Actual tar and nicotine deliveries will vary based on how you hold and smoke your cigarette. For more information, contact [www.bwtarnic.com](http://www.bwtarnic.com)

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**SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, Emphysema, And May Complicate Pregnancy.**