

CANCER ANSWERLINE

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY

A regular feature prepared by the American Cancer Society to help save your life from cancer.

QUESTION: What are the chances of being cured of lung cancer?

QUESTION: Can one smoke a small number of cigarettes without risk?

ANSWERline: No. Since every cigarette causes some harm to the body, even relatively light smokers show lung damage on autopsy. Besides, in practice, most smokers seem to find it difficult to smoke only a few cigarettes. The average U.S. smoker today consumes nearly a pack and a half of cigarettes a day.

QUESTION: What is the effect of carbon monoxide (CO) in cigarette smoke?

ANSWERline: Carbon monoxide, which makes up about four percent of the smoke of the average American cigarette, has a stronger affinity for red blood cells than does oxygen, which red blood cells are meant to distribute to the body's tissues. Thus CO in smoke quickly displaces a large amount of oxygen in red cells, forming "carboxyhemoglobin." The average smoker has from 2.5 to 13.5 percent more of this substance in the blood than nonsmokers. While nicotine causes the heart to work harder, it deprives the heart of the extra oxygen such work demands. Carbon monoxide also promotes cholesterol deposits in arteries. It impairs vision and judgment, and reduces attentiveness to sounds. Thus CO is dangerous to drivers, reduces athletic performance, and poses particular hazards to flight crews.

QUESTION: What in cigarettes causes lung cancer?

ANSWERline: We do not know exactly, but a number of substances in smoke condensate are carcinogenic in animals. A number of others are co-carcinogenic — that is they can produce cancer when combined with other chemicals present in the smoke. Others are tumor promoters. Once a cancer starts they can cause it to grow faster.

ANSWERline: Very low. The overall five-year survival rate is about 10 percent. Most forms of the disease start insidiously and produce no symptoms until too far advanced for effective treatment to begin. The Surgeon General's Report of 1979 states that "the past 15 years have brought little significant progress in the early diagnosis or treatment of lung cancer." The report goes on to point out that lung cancer is largely a preventable disease. That is, it can be prevented by not smoking.

QUESTION: Once one stops smoking, is it okay to have a cigarette now and then?

ANSWERline: No. Nicotine seems to create a lasting tolerance in the body. When an ex-smoker takes a cigarette, even years after quitting, the nicotine reaction is triggered and he or she may be quickly hooked again. In the same way that a recovering alcoholic can never drink again, an ex-smoker should never smoke again.

QUESTION: Is passive smoking hazardous?

ANSWERline: Passive smoking is the breathing of smoke from someone else's cigarette. There is a difference between mainstream smoke, which is inhaled directly by the smoker, and sidestream smoke, which is released into the air by the smoldering cigarette. Mainstream smoke mainly affects the smoker, but sidestream smoke contains higher percentages of tar, nicotine and noxious gases when it leaves the cigarette. Even when diluted, sidestream smoke may cause strong allergic reactions in some people. A few preliminary reports have indicated that it may create a risk of lung cancer among persons who do not smoke. While definite answers to questions about passive smoking are not yet available, this is a problem of growing concern.



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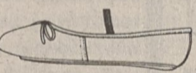
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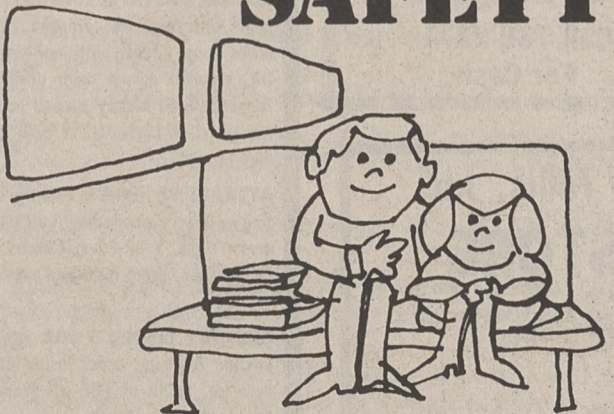
Beige, White, Black



Black, White & Pink



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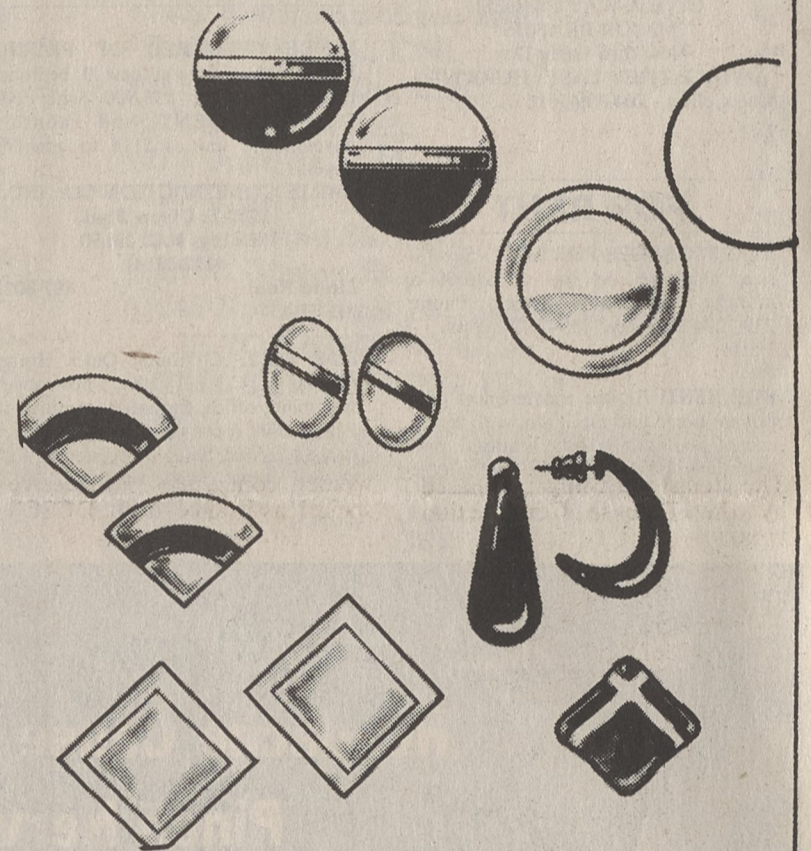
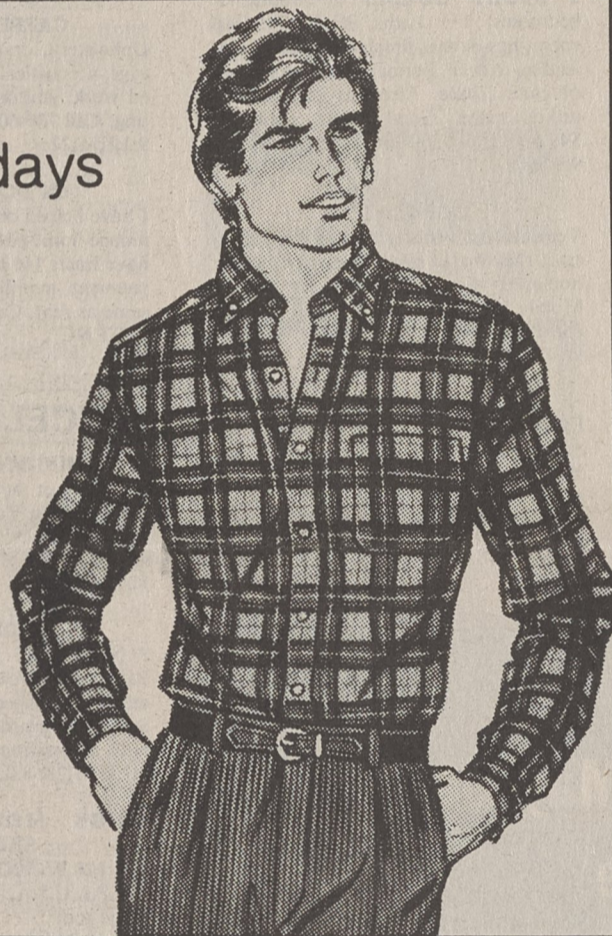
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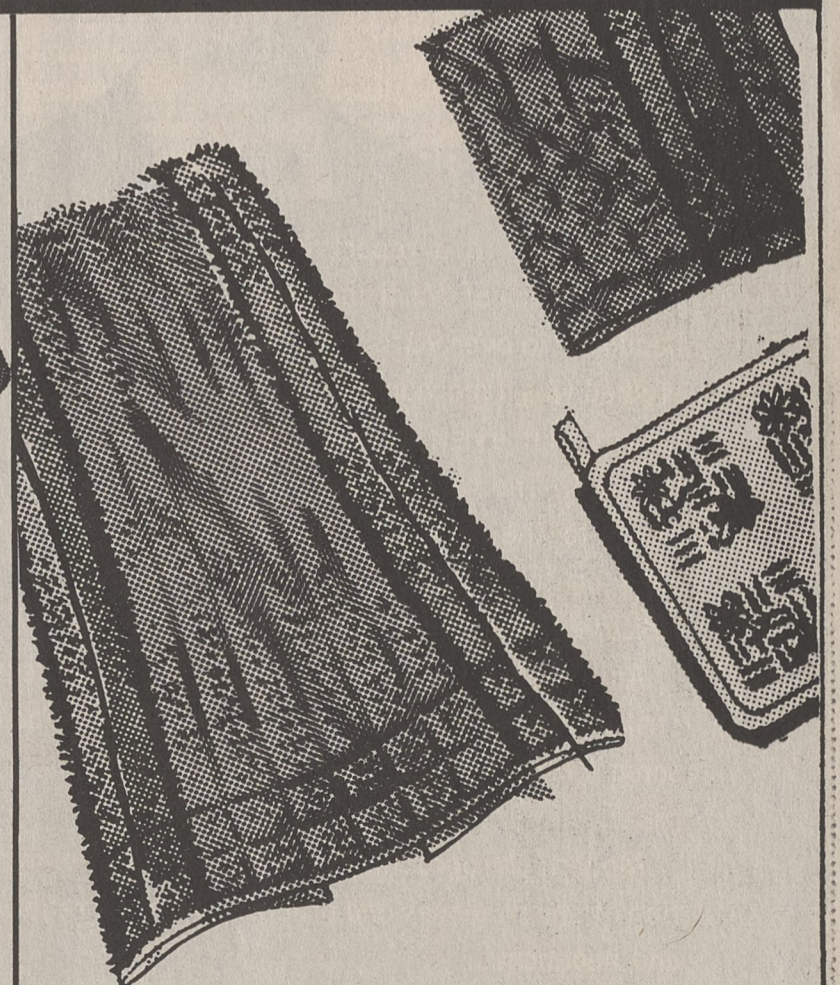
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