What is Carbon Monoxide?

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that you can't see or smell. This is not the same as the gas called Carbon Dioxide (CO2) which is part of the air we breathe.

Where is CO found?

When materials containing carbon such as cigarettes, poorly ventilated coal fires or faulty boilers burn they give off CO. As a result if you inhale your own or someone else's cigarette smoke or someone else's second hand smoke you breathe in CO.

We can test CO levels using the CO monitor. The more CO you inhale, the higher the reading.

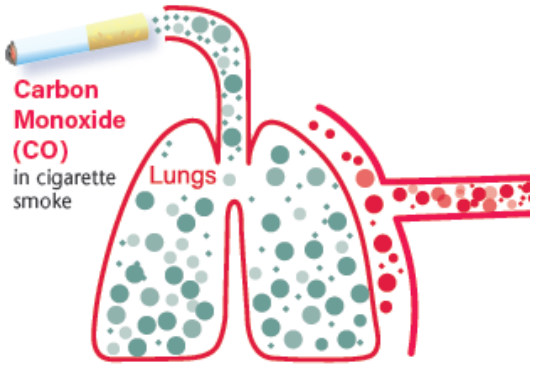
The good news about stopping

When you stop smoking your CO levels drop very quickly. In 24 hours, your CO levels go back to the level of a non- smoker. The pictures below show the process of doing a CO reading.

CO in your blood stream

When you breathe in smoke the CO is absorbed in your lungs and picked up by your red blood cells. CO sticks to red blood cells 200x more than oxygen.

It is then carried around your body and produces a thick fatty plaque that can cause heart disease, stroke and bad circulation. It also means the blood stream carries less oxygen.



Step 1: Turn on the CO monitor by pressing this button



Step 2: Once on, the countdown will start. Ask clients to hold their breath



Step 3: Once this image shows, ask clients to take a long slow breath into the monitor to empty their lungs



Step 4: The CO reading will be displayed here. The chart on the right shows readings in parts per million. Green indicates a non smoking reading



Breath ppm
30
29
28
27
26
25
24
23
22
21
20
19
18
17
16
15
14
13
12
11
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0

Unexpected high readings

Sometimes a client will state they've stopped smoking, and give an unexpected high reading.

Don't assume they're not being honest.

Here are a list of things that could cause an unexpected high reading:

- dispersible drugs (eg dissolvable paracetamol)
- lactose intolerance (most people would know if they were intolerant, but consider this may be undiagnosed)
- faulty gas boilers, poorly ventilated fires, or car exhausts
- being exposed to paint stripper