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CIGARETTE LIGHTER THUMB

To the Editor:

Several reports have described cutaneous changes produced by cigarette smoking (1), including nicotine staining of the fingers (2), nicotine stomatitis (3), and smoker's face (4).

We report a new clinical sign associated with cigarette smoking that we noted in 27 patients: increased cornification of the radial aspect of the

right thumb, just distal to the pulp prominence. Interestingly, the sign was first discovered on the thumb of one of the authors. This sign can be seen on close inspection of the thumb, but is more easily palpated as a thickening of the corneal layer of the palmar skin of the thumb. We believe this finding is the result of repeated friction of the thumb against the roller of cigarette lighters.

Although this sign is nonexistent in smokers who use matches and other flame-producing apparatus, we have found it a fairly constant sign in patients who use cigarette lighters. Nicotine staining, which is caused by the tar content of cigarettes, occurs in patients who smoke down to the "butt" of the cigarette. It is therefore not always present in heavy smokers. We found our "cigarette lighter thumb"

in 4 patients who had no visible nicotine staining and who smoked more than 20 cigarettes per day.

We believe that this sign may help determine the degree of tobacco use by patients who use lighters.

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