

UCSD Researchers Find Young Adults More Likely to Quit Smoking Successfully

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Young adults are more likely than older adults to quit smoking successfully, partly because they are more likely to make a serious effort to quit, say researchers at the Moores Cancer Center at the University of California, San Diego.

The study, “Smoking Cessation Rates in the United States: A Comparison of Young Adult and Older Smokers,” published in the Jan. 2, 2008 American Journal of Public Health also found that young adults, aged 18 to 24, are more likely to have tried to quit smoking than older adults, aged 50 to 64.

“Most previous studies focused on smokers aged 35 and older who have smoked for 20 years or more,” said John P. Pierce, Ph.D., director of the UC San Diego’s Cancer Prevention and Control Program. “That has led to an overemphasis on drug treatments to help cessation, whereas this study emphasized the importance of implementing a smoke free home if a smoker wants to quit successfully.”

The study utilized the largest available national data sample, the 2003 Tobacco Use Supplement to the U.S. Current Population Survey, to evaluate the relationship between smoking cessation rates and tobacco-related behaviors between age groups. Eighty-four percent of those 18 to 24 years old reported seriously trying to quit in the prior year compared to just 64 percent of those 50 to 64 years old.

Additionally, the proportion of recent smokers who had quit for at least

six months generally decreased as age increased. The older the smoker is, the less likely he or she is to quit or even try to quit. Young adult smokers were also more likely to come from smoke-free homes, were less likely to use pharmaceutical aids, and typically smoked fewer cigarettes a day.

"It is likely that high cessation rates among 18- to 24-year-olds also reflect changing social norms over the previous decade," said Karen Messer, Ph.D., Moores UCSD Cancer Center. "Future tobacco control efforts aimed at increasing cessation rates among young adult smokers should continue to target social norms."

The study also showed that smokers who lived in a smoke-free home were four times more successful at quitting than those not in a home with a smoker.

"It has been hypothesized that young people who take up smoking with restrictions at work and home are likely to develop lower levels of dependence than smokers who took up the habit without such restrictions," said Pierce. "Smoke-free homes place barriers around important potential smoking situations, such as after a meal. This study emphasizes that these barriers may be sufficient to prevent relapse and offer a partial explanation for the strong association of smoke-free homes and successful quitting."

The pharmaceutical aids, such as nicotine patches, inhalers, anti-depressive pills or nasal sprays, were helpful for smokers aged 35 to 49 years old.

In addition, while many studies have show that African-Americans have more difficulty quitting than Non-Hispanic White smokers, this study showed African-Americans were less likely to quit but more likely to report trying to quit.

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Source: the University of California, San Diego

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