Evidence supports use of Web- and computer-based programs to help adults quit smoking

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Available evidence supports the use of online or other computer-based smoking cessation programs for helping adults quit smoking, according to a meta-analysis of previously published studies appearing in the May 25 issue of *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

"Smoking is the single greatest cause of preventable disease and premature death," the authors write as background information in the article. Currently recommended smoking cessation strategies include individual or group counseling, medications and telephone quit-line counseling.

Seung-Kwon Myung, M.D., M.S., then at the University of California, Berkeley, and now at the National Cancer Center, Goyang, South Korea, and colleagues identified 22 randomized controlled trials of Web- and computer-based programs published between 1989 and 2008. The trials included a total of 29,549 participants, 16,050 of whom were randomly assigned to a computer-based program and 13,499 to a control group. Ten studies used supplemental interventions—such as counseling, classroom lessons, nicotine replacement gum or patches, medication or quitlines—whereas 12 studies used Web- or computer-based programs alone.

When the results of the trials were pooled and analyzed, individuals assigned to use computer- or Web-based programs were about 1.5 times more likely to quit smoking than those assigned to control groups. Abstinence rates were higher among intervention groups than control

groups after six to 10 months (11.7 percent vs. 7 percent) and 12 months (9.9 percent vs. 5.7 percent) of follow-up. The effects of these programs were similar to those of counseling interventions, the authors note.

"The stand-alone interventions had a significant effect on smoking cessation as well as on those that had supplemental interventions," the authors write. "However, compared with adults, these programs did not significantly increase the abstinence rate in adolescent populations."

"Our findings imply that there is sufficient evidence to support the use of a Web- or computer-based smoking cessation program for adult smokers," the authors conclude. "As global Web users continue to increase, Web-based smoking cessation programs could become a promising new strategy that is easily accessible for smokers worldwide."

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