

Trying to quit smoking? Try eating more fruits and vegetables

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(Medical Xpress) -- If you're trying to quit smoking, eating more fruits and vegetables may help you quit and stay tobacco-free for longer, according to a new study published online by University at Buffalo public health researchers.

The paper, in the journal *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*, is the first [longitudinal study](#) on the relationship between fruit and vegetable consumption and [smoking cessation](#).

The authors, from UB's School of Public Health and Health Professions, surveyed 1,000 smokers aged 25 and older from around the country, using random-digit dialing telephone interviews. They followed up with the respondents fourteen months later, asking them if they had abstained from [tobacco use](#) during the previous month.

"Other studies have taken a snapshot approach, asking smokers and nonsmokers about their diets," says Gary A. Giovino, PhD, chair of the Department of [Community Health](#) and [Health Behavior](#) at UB. "We knew from our previous work that people who were abstinent from cigarettes for less than six months consumed more fruits and [vegetables](#) than those who still smoked. What we didn't know was whether recent quitters increased their fruit and vegetable consumption or if smokers who ate more fruits and vegetables were more likely to quit."

The UB study found that smokers who consumed the most fruit and vegetables were three times more likely to be tobacco-free for at least 30

days at follow-up 14 months later than those consuming the lowest amount of fruits and vegetables. These findings persisted even when adjustments were made to take into account age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, [household income](#) and health orientation.

They also found that smokers with higher fruit and vegetable consumption smoked fewer cigarettes per day, waited longer to smoke their first cigarette of the day and scored lower on a common test of nicotine dependence.

"We may have identified a new tool that can help people [quit smoking](#)," says Jeffrey P. Haibach, MPH, first author on the paper and graduate research assistant in the UB Department of Community Health and Health Behavior. "Granted, this is just an observational study, but improving one's diet may facilitate quitting."

Several explanations are possible, such as less [nicotine dependence](#) for people who consume a lot of fruits and vegetables or the fact that higher fiber consumption from fruits and vegetables make people feel fuller.

"It is also possible that fruits and vegetables give people more of a feeling of satiety or fullness so that they feel less of a need to smoke, since smokers sometimes confuse hunger with an urge to smoke," explains Haibach.

And unlike some foods which are known to enhance the taste of tobacco, such as meats, caffeinated beverages and alcohol, [fruits and vegetables](#) do not enhance the taste of tobacco.

"Foods like fruit and vegetables may actually worsen the taste of cigarettes," says Haibach.

While smoking rates in the U.S. continue to decline, Giovino notes, the

rate of that decline has slowed during the past decade or so. "Nineteen percent of Americans still smoke cigarettes, but most of them want to quit," he says.

Haibach adds: "It's possible that an improved diet could be an important item to add to the list of measures to help smokers quit. We certainly need to continue efforts to encourage people to quit and help them succeed, including proven approaches like quitlines, policies such as tobacco tax increases and smoke-free laws, and effective media campaigns."

The UB researchers caution that more research is needed to determine if these findings replicate and if they do, to identify the mechanisms that explain how fruit and [vegetable consumption](#) may help smokers quit. They also see a need for research on other dietary components and smoking cessation.

Gregory G. Homish, PhD, assistant professor in the UB Department of Community Health and Health Behavior, also is a co-author.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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