

# Kicking the habit—New research examines the barriers to quitting smoking for smokers with asthma

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(Medical Xpress)—A new University of Cincinnati study examines how anxiety sensitivity can thwart the efforts of smokers with asthma to quit smoking. This new direction of research from Alison McLeish, a UC assistant professor of psychology, will be presented on Nov.17, at the 46th annual convention of the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) in National Harbor, Md.

Anxiety sensitivity, or AS, refers to a person's chronic fear of anxiety-related symptoms – the belief that experiences such as sweaty palms, shallow breathing, headache or [rapid heartbeat](#) could bring on something

much worse, either physically, mentally or socially.

McLeish's study of 125 smokers with asthma found that anxiety sensitivity was a significant factor in impeding the smokers' efforts to quit smoking, even though the participants with higher anxiety sensitivity were more likely to report that they wanted to quit because of the [health factors](#) associated with asthma and smoking. Participants with high anxiety sensitivity were also more likely to report self-control as motivations for quitting.

"If people are smoking to cope with anxiety, which is often what smokers do, [quitting smoking](#) can temporarily increase their anxiety, which will give people high in anxiety sensitivity the exact symptoms they're afraid of," explains McLeish. "Since anxiety is more common among individuals with asthma, this could explain why smokers with asthma have a harder time quitting smoking.

"This also shows that in addition to the barriers to cessation, smokers with asthma and high [levels of anxiety](#) sensitivity wanted to quit for their own well-being and to show that they could do it," says McLeish.

McLeish says the study suggests that smokers with asthma who have high [anxiety sensitivity](#) may need specialized intervention efforts to overcome their perceived barriers to quitting smoking – interventions targeted toward their health concerns and building their [self confidence](#).

Participants in the study were 125 smokers with asthma, 46 percent female, with an average age of around 37. They reported being regular smokers for an average of 20.6 years and smoked about a pack of cigarettes per day. Of those who participated in the study, 54.5 percent were African-American, 41.5 were Caucasian; 1.6 percent were Asian and 2.4 percent reported "other."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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