

Smokers at increased risk for non-life threatening health conditions and reduced quality of life in old age

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A study conducted by UAlbany's Benjamin A. Shaw tracked the effects of smoking in the areas of mobility impairment, musculoskeletal pain, and symptoms of psychological distress.

(Medical Xpress)—Smokers and former smokers who survive into old age are at a heightened risk for non-life threatening ailments that can reduce quality of life and expand the need for health services, according to a cohort study led by Benjamin A. Shaw, UAlbany associate professor in the School of Public Health.

The report examined the progression of three prevalent conditions: mobility impairment, musculoskeletal pain, and symptoms of psychological distress. Conducted in conjunction with the Aging Research Center at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden, the

study tracked [smoking](#) trajectories from mid-life to old age and the development of non-life-threatening health problems. The 34-year [prospective cohort study](#) was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Preventive Medicine*.

While several previous studies have reported and confirmed [correlations](#) between [tobacco smoking](#) and numerous life-threatening diseases, this study uniquely investigates the association between smoking trajectories, including the amount and continuance of smoking, and the progression of three prevalent non-life threatening conditions: mobility impairment, musculoskeletal pain, and symptoms of psychological distress.

Data from the "Swedish Panel Study of Living Conditions of the Oldest Old" combined with data from the "Swedish Level of Living Survey" allowed for 34 years of follow-up of a sample of 1,060 Swedish adults aged 30-50. The three health indicators and smoking status were assessed at four periods between 1968 and 2002. Based on the smoking status classifications of current non-smoking, light smoking, or heavy smoking, each person's smoking pattern over time was distinguished and used as a predictor of differences in health trajectories.

While mobility impairment showed no differences between smoking trajectory groups at baseline, over time all [smokers](#) and former smokers exhibited earlier onset and more rapid rises in [mobility problems](#) compared with persistent non-smokers, possibly due to higher frequency of lung problems, cardiovascular diseases, and stroke related to smoking. Persistent heavy smokers demonstrated raised levels of [psychological distress](#) at baseline and over time. Furthermore, while not statistically significant, all smoking groups stated they had more pain symptoms than the non-smokers at baseline and over time.

Perhaps the most surprising finding to researchers was that the health trajectories of individuals who quit smoking were more similar to those

of persistent smokers than persistent non-smokers during follow-up. These similarities may be the result of damage caused by many years of smoking that is now irreversible at such an advanced age. Risk for health problems in former smokers may also be higher due to health problems being the motive for smoking cessation in many individuals.

"More studies need to be conducted on this issue, as an expanding population of adults with a history of smoking reaches old age, develops chronic health problems, and presents substantial demands on our health care system," said Shaw.

Provided by University at Albany

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