

Smokers who quit cut heart disease risk faster than previous estimates

November 20 2013

Cigarette smokers who are over 65 years of age may be able to lower their risk of cardiovascular disease-related deaths to the level of never-smokers when they quit faster than previously reported, according to research presented at the American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions 2013.

A study showed that [older people](#) who smoked less than 32 "pack years" – 3.2 packs (20 cigarettes per pack) a day for no more than 10 years or less than one pack a day for 30 years—and gave up smoking 15 or fewer years ago lowered their risks of developing [heart failure](#) or dying from heart failure, heart attacks and strokes to the same level as those who had never smoked.

Previous research showed it may take up to 15 years or more of abstinence for smokers to reach similar cardiovascular death risks as people who never smoke. But many of the people in the study were able to reduce their risk in less than 15 years (median eight years).

"It's good news," said Ali Ahmed, M.D., M.P.H., senior researcher and professor of [cardiovascular disease](#) at the University of Alabama at Birmingham's School of Medicine. "Now there's a chance for even less of a waiting period to get a cleaner bill of [cardiovascular health](#)."

Ahmed and his colleagues analyzed 13 years of medical information compiled in the Cardiovascular Health Study, started in 1989 and funded by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. They compared 853

people who quit smoking 15 or fewer years before with 2,557 people who had never smoked.

Of the 853 former smokers, 319 had smoked less than 32 pack years. Pack years are determined by multiplying the cigarette packs smoked per day times the number of years a person has smoked. All participants were over age 65 years of age. Results were adjusted for age, gender and race.

Smokers who smoked less than 32 pack years but quit 15 or fewer years ago still had higher risks of dying from causes unrelated to cardiovascular health, such as cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and emphysema. Former smokers who smoked more than 32 pack years had higher risks of dying from any health condition.

"Smoking is the most preventable cause of early death in America—if you smoke, quit and quit early!" Ahmed said.

Provided by American Heart Association

Citation: Smokers who quit cut heart disease risk faster than previous estimates (2013, November 20) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-11-smokers-heart-disease-faster-previous.html>

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