

Many smokers still surprised by facts about tobacco's dangers

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A new study in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* finds that many smokers still find accurate and detailed facts about the dangers of tobacco both new and motivating in terms of their desire to quit. This finding proved to be especially marked among members of groups that are most likely to be smokers today.

"The tobacco industry systematically deceived the public for decades, denying that smoking was dangerous or addictive," explained one of the study's authors James Thrasher, associate professor at the University of South Carolina Arnold School of Public Health.

Meanwhile cigarette makers were actually designing their products to be

more addictive to increase sales. Because of their deceitfulness, a landmark court ruling in 2006 stated that the industry had to provide "corrective statements" about their past deceptions on five topics: health effects of smoking for [smokers](#); [health effects](#) of secondhand smoke for nonsmokers; cigarette and nicotine addictiveness; industry design of cigarettes to increase addiction; and the lack of relative safety of low-tar and light cigarettes.

For nearly a decade, though, implementation of this ruling has been delayed while the industry has fought back in the courts. During this delay, [tobacco marketing](#) continues to make tobacco use seem like a "normal, important part of everyday behavior," the authors wrote.

"Our study found that many smokers are still unaware of tobacco industry lies," said Thrasher. He added that smokers indicate that receiving factual, corrective information about the dangers of smoking motivates them to quit; also that members of groups that are highly targeted by the tobacco industry were especially responsive to the corrective statements. These groups include women, African Americans, Latinos and lower-income people. "This study suggests that the longer we wait to give smokers this information about the [tobacco industry's](#) lies, the more smokers will continue to consume [tobacco](#)" noted Thrasher.

1,404 smokers ranging in age from 18 to 64 years old and of diverse ethnic, gender and income groups were presented with the corrective statements. Between one half and one third of the study participants stated that some information in the corrective statements was novel to them. Those who experienced novelty were likelier to express anger at the industry, to find the message(s) relevant and to feel motivated to quit by the message(s). Novelty ratings ran consistently higher among African Americans and Latinos than among non-Hispanic whites.

Should corrective statements one day be "widely disseminated and highly visible, they will serve a key public education function," says Andrea Villanti, Ph.D., MPH, associate director for regulatory science and policy at the American Legacy Foundation. By correcting previous lies, she says, they "may have a role in preventing youth from initiating smoking and increasing cessation among adults."

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

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