

Risk of weight gain deters some smokers from seeking treatment to quit

May 1 2014



Smoking harms nearly every organ in the body and causes many diseases. Credit: CDC/Debra Cartagena

Smokers may avoid treatment to quit smoking if they previously gained weight while trying to quit, according to researchers at Penn State College of Medicine.

Weight gain is a predictable occurrence for smokers who have recently

quit. Within the first year after quitting, they gain an average of eight to 14 pounds, and some smokers report that they keep smoking simply because they do not want to gain weight from quitting.

Susan Veldheer, project manager in the Department of Public Health Sciences, predicted that smokers would avoid [treatment](#) to quit if they are highly concerned about gaining weight.

Researchers surveyed 186 smokers who sought treatment to quit and 102 smokers who avoided treatment. Smokers were defined as "seeking treatment" if they participated in a smoking cessation treatment research study. Other smokers were approached in the clinics and offered the cessation treatment research study. If they were not interested in the study, they were defined as "not seeking treatment," or avoiding it. Participants were current smokers who smoked at least five cigarettes per day and were recruited from Penn State Hershey Medical Center.

All participants were asked about weight gain during past attempts to quit and their concern for gaining weight after quitting in the future. Overall, smokers who sought treatment to quit were equally concerned about gaining weight as the smokers who avoided treatment. The difference was in whether or not the smokers had gained weight before. Of all the participants, 53 percent had gained weight during a previous attempt to quit smoking. Within this subgroup, smokers who were highly concerned about [gaining weight](#) were more likely to avoid treatment to help them quit. These findings appeared in *The International Journal of Clinical Practice*.

"Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that smokers who gained weight previously are 'once bitten, twice shy,'" Veldheer said. "They are concerned about [weight gain](#) if they attempt to quit even though they may know the benefits of quitting."

Researchers suggest that clinicians should ask smokers if they had previously gained weight while trying to quit. If so, these [smokers](#) should be assured that strategies to maintain [weight](#) will be addressed in treatment.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Risk of weight gain deters some smokers from seeking treatment to quit (2014, May 1)
retrieved 1 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-05-weight-gain-deters-smokers-treatment.html>

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