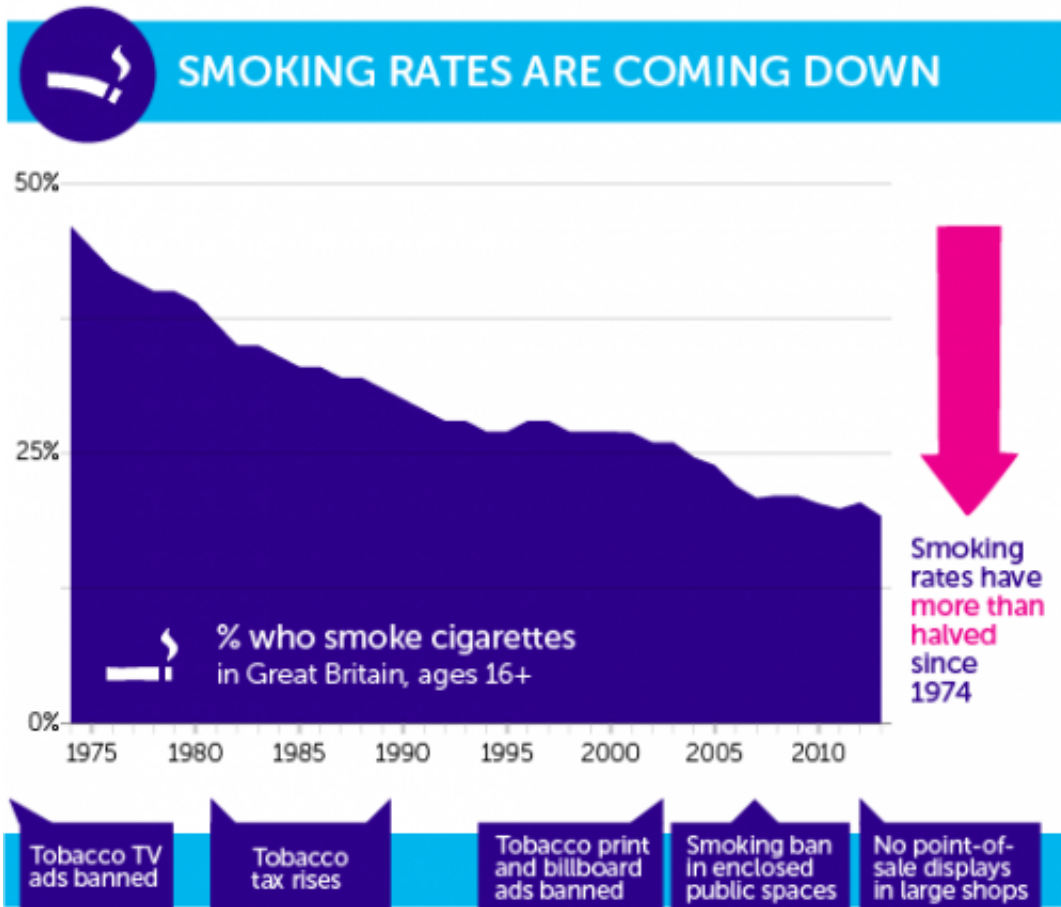


Smoking rates halve since 1970s in Britain

November 28 2014



Credit: Cancer Research UK

The number of smokers in Britain has more than halved in the past four decades, according to the latest figures.

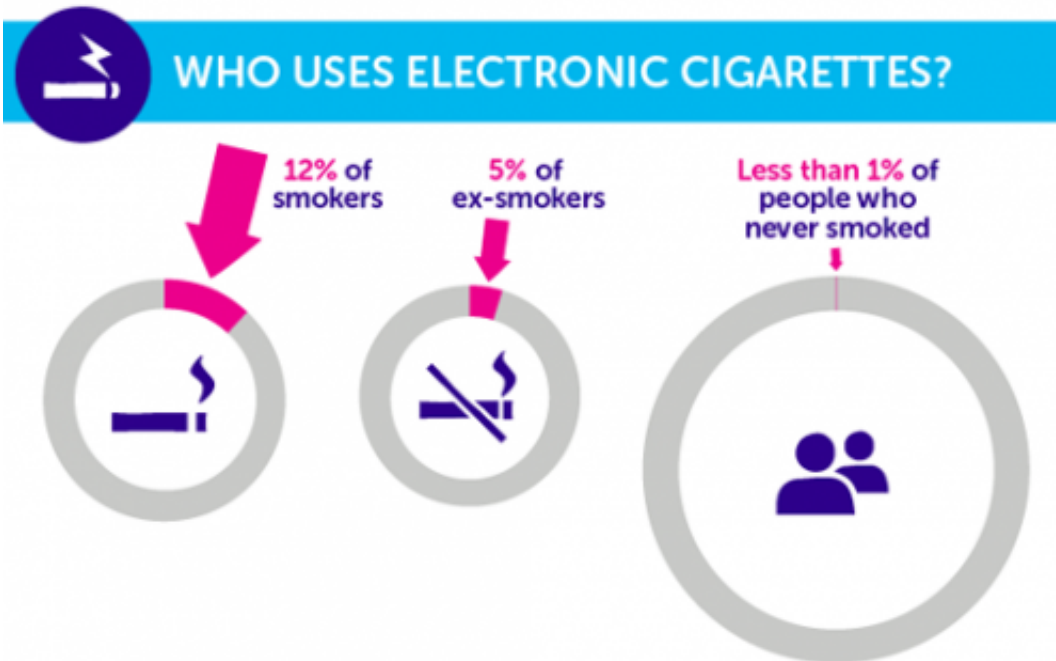
Data from the Office for National Statistics for 2013 show that one in

five British people (19 per cent) smoke. By comparison, just under half (46 per cent) of the population were smokers in 1974.

The statistics suggest campaigns highlighting the effects smoking can have on people's health are having an impact. But the Government has been urged not to slow down its drive to help people kick the habit, which is one of the biggest causes of death and serious illness in the UK.

George Butterworth, [tobacco](#) policy manager at Cancer Research UK, said: "Smoking rates don't come down on their own. Successive government interventions such as tax rises, bans on advertising and smoke-free legislation have contributed to this downward trend. But smoking still causes around 100,000 deaths every year in the UK, increasingly in the most deprived sections of society.

"We urge the Government to maintain momentum by introducing standardised packaging with graphic health warnings and drab colours - to replace attractive, colourful branding of [tobacco products](#).



E-cig users in Great Britain, Jan-Mar 2014. Based on data for people aged 16+, from ONS.

Credit: Cancer Research UK

"Half of all long-term smokers will die as a result of their [tobacco addiction](#) - and the [tobacco industry](#)'s slick marketing is designed to keep up the number of people using their deadly products. Standardised packaging is an important step in making this lethal product less attractive to children."

A breakdown of the statistics shows the proportion of the population who have never smoked cigarettes had risen from just under four in 10 (37 per cent) to around six in 10 (58 per cent) since the mid-70's. At the same time, the proportion of the population who had quit doubled, moving from just over a quarter to more than half.

Smoking rates were higher among the unemployed and those with lower educational qualifications. This supports previous findings that social

inequality and deprivation is reflected in the number of people who still smoke.

The latest statistics also include preliminary data on e-cigarettes, with their use becoming more widespread in Britain in the last five years.

There are concerns that e-cigarettes could act as a 'gateway' to smoking, while it has also been argued they could prove useful in attempts to cut tobacco use.

The figures from the ONS suggest that their use is negligible in those that have never smoked – less than one per cent. The research found that e-cigarettes are almost exclusively used by smokers – 12 in every 100 smokers also use an e-cigarette, while five in every 100 former smokers are now using e-cigarettes.

Butterworth added: "E-cigarettes may have the potential to help many smokers quit but they are not entirely risk free. Their popularity has grown rapidly in recent years and there are now around 2.1 million users in the UK.

"There are concerns that they could act as a gateway to tobacco cigarettes but these new data seem to support existing evidence, at least for now, that e-cigarettes are being used predominantly by smokers and ex-smokers. We support light touch regulations of [e-cigarettes](#) to ensure their safety and that they are not marketed to non-[smokers](#) and children."

More information: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ghs/opi..._its-in-great-britain—2013/index.html

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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