

Even with a little weight gain, quitting smoking is still healthier choice

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Japanese study found that stopping the habit boosted survival, even if a few pounds were added on.

(HealthDay)—Fear of unhealthy weight gain can be a factor holding smokers back from quitting the habit. But a new study finds that even if you do add a few pounds once you quit, your post-cigarette health is still much better than if you'd kept on smoking.

"This study is important for smokers to understand," said Patricia Folan, director of the Center for Tobacco Control at North Shore-LIJ Health System in Great Neck, N.Y.

"The weight gain that may accompany [quitting smoking](#) does not equal the overwhelming health consequences of continued smoking," said Folan, who was not involved in the new research.

The study was led by Dr. Hisako Tsuji, of the Health Promotion

Department in Osaka, Japan. Her team tracked health outcomes for more 1,300 adults who quit smoking and compared them to more than 2,800 ongoing smokers. The participants averaged 54 years of age and were followed between 1997 and 2013.

Of those who quit smoking, 362 did not gain weight, 458 gained no more than 2 kilograms (a little more than 4 pounds) and 485 gained more than 2 kilograms.

Compared to people who kept on smoking, the risk of dying over the study period was still 34 percent lower among quitters who did not gain weight, 49 percent lower among those who gained no more than 2 kilograms, and 26 percent lower among those who gained more than 2 kilograms.

The findings were to be presented Tuesday at the annual meeting of the American Heart Association (AHA) in Chicago.

"Quitters had a significantly lower risk of death compared to smokers regardless of their weight change after they stopped smoking," Tsuji said in an AHA news release.

Folan also believes that many smokers' fears of post-quit weight gain may be exaggerated. She said that many people who consult with her at the hospital's [smoking cessation program](#) say that "fear of weight gain has been obstacle to quitting for them. However, the majority of the participants report only an average weight gain of less than 5 pounds after quitting."

Another expert agreed that quitting smoking is always the best route to take for your health.

"The potential for weight gain should never be a deterrent," said Dr.

Suzanne Steinbaum, a preventive cardiologist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. "Quitting smoking is the most significant way to reduce the risk of heart disease, in spite of the potential for developing other risk factors."

Folan added that [quit-smoking](#) program should take people's fears of [weight gain](#) into account, however.

"Cessation programs should include weight management strategies as part of their counseling, particularly for women," she said. "In addition, individuals who quit [smoking](#) often report an increase in their ability to exercise—resulting not only in weight loss but also stress management."

Experts note that findings presented at medical meetings are typically considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

More information: There are tips on quitting smoking at the [American Cancer Society](#).

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