

# The numbers are in: As many as 2 in 3 smokers will die from their habit

February 24 2015

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A large Australian study of more than 200,000 people has provided independent confirmation that up to two in every three smokers will die from their habit if they continue to smoke.

The research, published today in the international journal *BMC Medicine*, is the first evidence from a broad cross-section of the population to show the smoking-related death toll is as high as two thirds.

"We knew smoking was bad but we now have direct independent evidence that confirms the disturbing findings that have been emerging internationally, said lead author Professor Emily Banks, Scientific Director of the Sax Institute's 45 and Up Study and a researcher at the Australian National University.

"Even with the very low rates of smoking that we have in Australia we found that smokers have around three-fold the risk of [premature death](#) of those who have never smoked. We also found smokers will die an estimated 10 years earlier than non-smokers."

Until relatively recently it was thought that about half of smokers would die of a smoking-related illness, but newer studies in UK women, British doctors and American Cancer Society volunteers have put the figure much higher, at up to 67%.

"We have been able to show exactly the same result in a very large population-wide sample," Professor Banks said.

The research is the result of a four-year analysis of health outcomes from more than 200,000 men and women participating in the Sax Institute's 45 and Up Study ? the largest longitudinal study of healthy ageing in the Southern Hemisphere.

Australia has one of the lowest smoking rates in the world - at 13% of the population ? and is an international leader on plain cigarette packaging. "But our findings are an important reminder that the war on tobacco is not yet won, and tobacco control efforts must go on," Professor Banks said.

The research was supported by the National Heart Foundation of Australia in collaboration with major 45 and Up Study partner Cancer Council NSW and was conducted by a national and international team. It also found that compared with non-smokers, smoking just 10 cigarettes a day doubles the risk of dying and smoking a pack a day increases the risk four- to five-fold.

The NSW Heart Foundation's CEO, Kerry Doyle, said the Australian Government was on the right path in driving down smoking rates through initiatives like tax increases and plain packaging.

"Higher tobacco prices have been shown to be the most effective intervention available to governments to reduce demand for tobacco. With smoking being a major cause of cardiovascular disease, including heart attack, stroke and peripheral vascular disease the more deterrents people have between them and [smoking](#), the better," Ms Doyle said.

Scott Walsberger, Tobacco Control Manager at Cancer Council NSW, said the research results highlighted an important message for [smokers](#): "It's never too late to quit ? no matter what your age, or how much you smoke."

Provided by Sax Institute

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