

Higher tobacco prices are an effective preventative measure

May 28 2015



World No Smoking Day: Higher tobacco prices are an effective preventative measure

Thirty percent of the estimated 2.3 million smokers in Austria are considered to be heavily tobacco-dependent and, according to experts at MedUni Vienna, require professional treatment. This would mean around 690,000 people. According to Michael Kunze, an expert on smoking at the Center for Public Health at MedUni Vienna, an effective strategy would be to increase the price of tobacco products: "If the price of cigarettes were to rise just one percent above the inflation rate, that would bring about a 0.5% reduction in consumption worldwide."

"At MedUni Vienna we were among the first to suggest solving this problem via a pricing strategy and to provide scientific evidence to back this up," explains Kunze on the occasion of World No Smoking Day this coming Sunday (31 May). However, this strategy would only make sense if it were to be implemented throughout Europe or within the European Union (EU). A cohesive policy is required because, at the moment, the completely different pricing policies in the various EU countries are getting in the way.

Making effective nicotine replacement treatments more accessible

At the same time, the social medicine experts at MedUni Vienna are calling for an effective programme of nicotine replacement therapy, similar to the methadone programme for heroin addicts. Although treatment options are available, they bear the stigma of being a drug treatment. "Many [smokers](#) say they do not want to take drugs, because they do not feel ill. If the replacement therapies were available without prescription, in pharmacies for example, the programme would work much better," stresses Kunze, citing the example of the Swedish programme with the air-dried chewing tobacco "Snus", whereby the nicotine finds its way into the bloodstream via the oral mucosa.

"Snus" is less damaging to health because it does not give rise to any toxins, such as those produced by burning tobacco during smoking. Kunze: "The prevalence of lung cancer has dropped by 50% in Sweden as a result." International studies have shown that consuming smokeless tobacco is up to 95% less harmful than smoking. However, with the exception of Sweden, the commercial sale of "Snus" is banned in the EU, even though it is not illegal to buy it, if you are aged 18 or over.

Smoking cessation brings benefits after only a few

days

The possible negative consequences of long-term tobacco consumption are clearly evidenced: [tobacco consumption](#) is the single biggest cause of illness and premature death in Europe: around 90% of deaths from lung cancer are caused by smoking and the same applies to 75% of deaths from chronic bronchitis and other respiratory diseases. Moreover, cigarette [smoking](#) is implicated in the development of pancreatic, kidney and cervical cancer.

It has also been proven that positive effects can occur very soon after quitting: "Even just a few days after the last cigarette, the risk of cardiovascular disease falls rapidly. Smoking practically constitutes carbon monoxide poisoning so, if you stop, you stop poisoning yourself," says Kunze. However, the cancer risk remains elevated for many years afterwards.

Provided by Medical University of Vienna

Citation: Higher tobacco prices are an effective preventative measure (2015, May 28) retrieved 20 March 2024 from

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