

Add neck problems to reasons not to smoke

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(HealthDay)—Here's yet another reason to snuff out that cigarette: Smoking can damage the cervical discs in your neck, a new study contends.

The discs, located between your vertebrae, absorb shock to the spine. They become dehydrated and shrink with age, and this degeneration can lead to [neck pain](#).

This new study found that smoking seems to worsen this natural wear and tear.

The researchers analyzed CT scans of 182 people. Current smokers had more advanced cervical degenerative disc disease than nonsmokers, according to the study.

The findings were to be presented Thursday at the Association of Academic Physiologists' annual meeting, in Sacramento, Calif.

"This is another example of the detrimental effects of smoking. Tobacco abuse is associated with a variety of diseases and death, and there are lifestyle factors associated with [chronic neck pain](#)," said lead investigator Dr. Mitchel Leavitt. He is a resident at Emory University's physical medicine and rehabilitation department, in Atlanta.

"Pain and spine clinics are filled with patients who suffer chronic neck and back pain, and this study provides the physician with more ammunition to use when educating them about their need to quit smoking," he added in an association news release.

Previous research has linked [smoking](#) with disc degeneration in the lower spine, but this is the first to do so in the neck, the researchers said.

Smoking damages blood vessels that the spinal discs need for nourishment, according to Leavitt.

"There are more and more high-quality studies coming out that show an association between healthy lifestyle and improved quality and quantity

of life as well as better disease management. Spine health is no different, and this study adds to existing studies that have looked at blood vessel health as it relates to chronic back pain," he said.

Further research is needed to assess how other [lifestyle factors](#) such as diet, alcohol use and obesity affect chronic back and [neck pain](#), Leavitt said.

Research presented at meetings is considered preliminary until it has appeared in a peer-reviewed medical journal.

More information: The North American Spine Society has more about [degenerative spinal conditions](#).

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