

# Young cancer survivors are more likely to smoke than people without cancer history

June 13 2016

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Researchers at The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston have found that cancer survivors who were diagnosed at adolescent and young adult ages are more likely to be current cigarette smokers than people who have not had cancer. The findings of this study are currently available in *Cancer*.

Smoking is the leading cause of [cancer](#) but the study found that cancer [survivors](#) were not staunch non-smokers.

"Smokers may be more likely to develop cancer, and as we found in our analysis, many survivors of adolescent and young adult cancer continue to smoke cigarettes after their diagnosis, which further affects their [health](#) and quality of life," said lead author Sapna Kaul, assistant professor of health economics. "These survivors may continue to smoke because of peer pressure or to bring a sense of normalcy during the stressful phase of treatment and survivorship."

The researchers identified 1,019 survivors of cancer from the 2012-2014 National Health Interview Surveys who were diagnosed when they were between 15 and 39 years old and were at least 5 years after diagnosis. A comparison group of people without a history of cancer was matched. The people in the study self-reported their [smoking](#) status, whether they were diagnosed with cancer and chronic illnesses such as asthma and diabetes, and their general health status.

The study found that 33 percent of survivors were current smokers

compared with 22 percent of the people without a history of cancer. The current smokers among survivors were significantly more likely to report chronic illness, such as having asthma, heart diseases, lung diseases, diabetes and poorer general health.

Certain characteristics of the survivors, such as insurance status and age at study, were associated with being a current smoker. More than 50 percent of survivors who were uninsured were current smokers compared with 22 percent of survivors with private insurance. Similarly, younger survivors were current smokers more often than older survivors.

Kaul said that in their study close to 40 percent of the currently smoking survivors reported not having any smoking-related discussion with health professionals in the previous year. She stated that addressing smoking during medical visits may be the first step in encouraging survivors to quit smoking. Survivors diagnosed with cancer at young ages need to be targeted for smoking-cessation to help them improve their quality of life.

Provided by University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston

Citation: Young cancer survivors are more likely to smoke than people without cancer history (2016, June 13) retrieved 30 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-06-young-cancer-survivors-people-history.html>

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