

# Sitting is NOT the new smoking, contrary to popular myth

November 5 2018

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Excessive sitting is not good for health but it pales into comparison with smoking, researchers say. Credit: Creative Commons

No, sitting is not the new smoking, despite what countless newspaper articles have peddled in recent years.

That's the consensus from an international team of researchers who have

laid to rest misleading claims comparing the health dangers of sitting for long periods with [smoking](#) cigarettes.

In the latest issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*, researchers from Canada, the US and Australia say that while research does suggest excessive sitting (roughly more than eight hours a day) increases the risk of [premature death](#) and some chronic diseases by 10-20%, this pales in comparison to the risks associated with smoking.

Smoking increases the risk of premature [death](#) from any cause by approximately 180 per cent, the researchers say.

University of South Australia epidemiologist Dr. Terry Boyle, one of nine researchers involved in the evaluation, says media stories comparing sitting with smoking increased 12-fold from 2012 to 2016, and some respected academic and clinical institutions have also spread the myth.

"The simple fact is, smoking is one of the greatest [public health](#) disasters of the past century. Sitting is not, and you can't really compare the two," Dr. Boyle says.

"First, the risks of chronic disease and premature death associated with smoking are substantially higher than for sitting. While people who sit a lot have around a 10-20 per cent increased risk of some cancers and [cardiovascular disease](#), smokers have more than double the risk of dying from cancer and cardiovascular [disease](#), and a more than 1000 per cent increased risk of lung cancer.

"Second, the economic impact and number of deaths caused by smoking-attributable diseases far outweighs those of sitting. For example, the annual global cost of smoking-attributable diseases was estimated at US\$467 billion in 2012 and smoking is expected to cause at least one billion deaths in the 21st century.

"Finally, unlike smoking, sitting is neither an addiction nor a danger to others.

"Equating the risk of sitting with smoking is clearly unwarranted and misleading, and only serves to trivialize the risks associated with smoking," Dr. Boyle says.

**More information:** Jeff K. Vallance et al. Evaluating the Evidence on Sitting, Smoking, and Health: Is Sitting Really the New Smoking?, *American Journal of Public Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2018.304649](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304649)

Provided by University of South Australia

Citation: Sitting is NOT the new smoking, contrary to popular myth (2018, November 5) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-11-contrary-popular-myth.html>

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