

# Unfiltered cigarettes are most deadly

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(HealthDay)—There's no such thing as a safe cigarette, but unfiltered cigarettes are even more likely to kill you, a new study finds.

People who smoke unfiltered cigarettes have double the risk of [lung](#) cancer death that other smokers do. And smoking unfiltered cigs was also linked to a 30% higher risk of dying from any cause.

"All cigarettes are bad. They all increase the risk for lung cancer and the risk of dying from lung cancer, but unfiltered cigarettes have the highest risk of any type of cigarette," said study author Dr. Nina Thomas. She is a fellow in pulmonary and critical care medicine at the Medical University of South Carolina, in Charleston.

The researchers also found that smokers of light, ultralight or [menthol cigarettes](#) were just as likely to get lung cancer and die from lung cancer as people who smoked regular filtered cigarettes.

When the public started becoming concerned about the potential health risks of cigarettes—even as far back as the 1950s—[tobacco companies](#) responded by making changes to cigarettes, such as lowering tar levels and adding menthol flavor, the researchers noted.

Despite these changes, cigarettes are still linked to 90% of lung cancers, according to the study authors.

To see whether different cigarette types made any difference in the development of lung [cancer](#) or deaths related to smoking, the researchers reviewed data from the National Lung Screening Trial.

Thomas said there were a little over 14,000 people in their nationally representative sample. The participants were all aged 55 to 74, and had to have smoked for at least 30 "pack years."

Pack years are calculated by multiplying the number of packs of cigarettes smoked per day by the number of years someone smoked. Examples of what 30 pack years might mean are smoking one pack a day for 30 years or two packs a day for 15 years, Thomas said.

The average amount those in this study smoked was 56 pack years. The researchers controlled the data to account for a number of factors, such

as sex, age and the number of pack years.

Smokers of unfiltered cigarettes were 40% more likely to develop [lung cancer](#). They were also about one-third more likely to be nicotine dependent than other smokers.

People who smoked light, ultralight or menthol cigarettes had the same health risks as people who smoked regular filtered cigarettes. But those using light or ultralight cigarettes were less likely to quit than other smokers were, the findings showed.

Eric Jacobs is senior scientific director of epidemiology research for the American Cancer Society. He said, "We have known for many years that cigarettes that were misleadingly marketed by the [tobacco industry](#) as 'light' or 'ultralight' were not meaningfully less lethal than other cigarettes, a fact that led the U.S government to ban use of the term 'light' in cigarette labeling and advertising in 2010."

Thomas said this study didn't delve into why unfiltered cigarettes appeared to be more deadly, but suspects it might be due to the high levels of tar.

Thomas also said the U.S. Food and Drug Administration should consider stronger regulations. Despite the FDA ban on using the word "light" on cigarette packaging, cigarette makers didn't change the look of cigarette packs, they only took the word "light" off to comply with the regulations. She said smokers likely still think of those particular cigarettes as light, and therefore safer.

"There's still this idea that light or ultralight might be better for you, and it's not," Thomas said.

According to Erika Sward, the national assistant vice president of

advocacy for the American Lung Association, "The tobacco industry has been lying to the American public, suggesting that there were cigarettes that were less harmful. It's happening again with the e-cigarette epidemic."

Sward added that "the FDA has to end this merry-go-round once and for all. They need to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products. Menthol flavoring just makes it easier for the poison to go down."

The study was to be presented Wednesday at the American Thoracic Society annual meeting, in Dallas. Findings presented at meetings are typically viewed as preliminary until they've been published in a peer-reviewed journal.

**More information:** Learn more about quitting smoking from the [American Cancer Society](#).

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