

Smoking linked to binge drinking and unhealthy eating

October 12 2010



Smokers are more likely than those who have never smoked to report engaging in poor lifestyle choices, including drinking above the guidelines and binge drinking as well as not eating the recommended amounts of fruit and vegetables, according to a new Cardiff University study out today.

The research, undertaken by ASH Wales in conjunction with the Cardiff Institute of Society, Health and Ethics at Cardiff University, looked at the health profile of 13,000 adults in Wales, and compared current and former smokers to those who had never smoked. Data derived from the Welsh Health Survey 2008. It should be noted that the prevalence rates for smoking in Wales were 24% for 2007, 2008 and 2009. The aim of

the study was to gain an understanding of the health status and behaviours of smokers in Wales today.

The study found that whilst smokers were more likely to report having been treated for heart, respiratory and arthritic conditions than their non-smoking counterparts, they were also more likely to admit drinking above the guidelines than non-smokers, with more men than women reporting both drinking above the national guidelines (currently more than four units for men and three for women) and [binge drinking](#) (more than eight units for men, six units for women). Smokers were also less likely to report getting their five daily portions of fruit and vegetables, than both ex-smokers and those who had never smoked.

Also of interest was the relationship between smoking and mental illness. Female [smokers](#) in particular were twice as likely as those who had never smoked to report suffering from a mental illness, and higher proportions of women (18%) than men (10%) reported being treated for some form of mental health condition (such as depression or anxiety).

Dr. Sarah Whitehead from the Cardiff Institute of Society and Health presents her findings to an international audience at the Smokefree Futures Tobacco Control Conference (held in Cardiff on 11 and 12 October). Dr. Whitehead said: “The findings reinforce what we already know - that smoking is linked to a number of associated illnesses and poor health behaviours. This will continue to be a problem for Wales unless more is done to reduce the smoking prevalence rates, which have remained at 24% since 2007.

Tanya Buchanan, Chief Executive of ASH Wales added: “We have known for many years now that smoking is a major cause of ill health and associated with a number of chronic health conditions but this research also reveals the link between smoking and multiple health risk behaviours. I will be asking the First Minister Carwyn Jones, who is

addressing our conference today, to look closely at this new evidence. Tobacco, alcohol, nutrition and fitness are all interlinked and are key areas requiring investment and positive action through a *Health in all Policies* approach which will return significant health benefits for the people of Wales.”

Andrew Misell, Policy Manager, Alcohol Concern Cymru: “This shows there is a relationship between excessive alcohol consumption and [smoking](#). We need to do more to educate people about the significant health risks associated with exceeding safe drinking limits. Tackling the culture of alcohol and tobacco misuse must be key priorities for the Welsh Assembly Government.”

Provided by Cardiff University

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