



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Even an Occasional Cigarette Greatly Boosts Mortality Risk

Many people who smoke occasionally think that they have only a minimal risk compared with regular smokers. However, a study published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* found that occasional smokers lived an average of five years less than nonsmokers. Everyday smokers live an average of ten years less than nonsmokers.

In 2015, 8.9 million people in the United States were occasional cigarette smokers, yet few studies have examined the health risks of occasional smoking. In the survey, half of the participants were never smokers, about one quarter were former smokers and about one quarter were current smokers. In the US, daily smoking has decreased (from 37 million in 2005 to 28 million in 2015) while occasional smoking is increasing. Occasional smokers reported smoking 50 cigarettes (2 ½ packs) per month in contrast to daily smokers, who smoked an average of 600 cigarettes (30 packs) per month.

The study found that compared with nonsmokers, occasional smokers who smoked more than 60 cigarettes a month had a 72 percent higher risk of dying, and a similar risk was observed in those smoking 30 to 60 cigarettes a month. Occasional smokers also had higher risks for cancer, heart disease and respiratory disease. Participants were followed through the date of death, the date they turned age 96 or Dec. 31, 2011, whichever came first.

About 17 percent of current smokers were occasional smokers, of whom about 65 percent said they had previously smoked daily and about 35 percent said they never smoked daily. Among former smokers, about 89 percent had smoked daily. The study also examined survival from age 18 to 95 by cigarette smoking status, with never smokers having a survival of 85 years, occasional smokers living an average of 80 years and daily smokers, 75 years.

“This confirms what we have long suspected. Smoking cigarettes, even occasionally, has significant adverse effects on health,” said Dr. James Mobley, Chair of the Regional Health Awareness Board. “To paraphrase a famous saying, a cigarette’s a cigarette, no matter how small.”

For those who have quit smoking in the last 15 years, a screening for lung cancer is recommended so that it can be detected early and treated if present. The procedure is an X-ray called low-dose CT scan, and is inexpensive and often covered by health insurance plans.

The Regional Health Awareness Board was created by an inter-local agreement between San Patricio County, Nueces County and the City of Corpus Christi to promote dialogue on the health/welfare and environmental issues that affect our communities. For further information contact Dr. James Mobley at 361-643-4546.

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