

One in two smokers are killed by tobacco

Description

One-half of smokers who do not quit smoking will die early from a smoking-related disease.

Summary of evidence

The American Cancer Society found that smokers are twice as likely to die in middle age as non-smokers.¹ The authors of an international study of mortality from smoking, cited in 2008 by both the World Health Organization,^{2,3} and the Ministry of Health,⁴ have used the data from the American Cancer Society study to estimate that approximately one-third to one-half of continuing smokers will die early.^{5,6}

Cited in the following publications:

- World Health Organization (2002).⁷
“...smokers of all ages have death rates two or three times higher than non-smokers” (p. 10).
- World Health Organization (2008).²
“Tobacco kills up to half of those who use it”.
- World Health Organization (2008).³
“Tobacco kills a third to half of all people who use it” (p. 10).
- Ministry of Health (2008).⁴
“It is estimated that half of all long-term smokers will die from a smoking related disease”.

Specific findings

- In 1982, the American Cancer Society began a prospective study of one million smokers and non-smokers. In a six-year follow-up, results showed that in middle age (defined as 45- to 74-years), the mortality rate of smokers was double that of non-smokers.¹
- In 1992, the authors of an international study of mortality from smoking, using a conservative assumption that only two-thirds of the more than double mortality rate in the American Cancer Society study¹ was due to tobacco, estimated that about 40% of smokers will die early of a smoking-related disease.⁵
- In a 1996 review article, the authors of an international study on smoking mortality estimated that one-third to one-half of smokers worldwide would “eventually be killed by their habit”⁶ (p. 20).

1 Garfinkel, L. (1985). Selection, follow-up and analysis in the American Cancer Society prospective studies. In: Garfinkel, Ochs, O., Mushinski, M. (eds.). Selection, follow-up and analysis in prospective studies: a workshop. NCI Monograph 67. National Cancer Institute, NIH Publication No. 85-2713, 1985:49-52.

2 World Health Organization (2008). *10 facts on the tobacco epidemic and its control*. (http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/tobacco_epidemic/en/index.html, retrieved September 2008).

3 World Health Organization (2008). *WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic*.

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- (<http://www.who.int/tobacco/mpower/en/>, retrieved October, 2008).
- 4 Ministry of Health (2008). *Tobacco control and smoking: Health effects of smoking*. (<http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/tobacco-effects>, retrieved September 2008).
- 5 Peto, R., Lopez, A. D., Boreham, J., Thun, M., & Heath, C. (1992). Mortality from tobacco in developed countries: Indirect estimation from national vital statistics. *Lancet*, 339, 1268-1278.
- 6 Peto, R., Lopez, A. D., Boreham, J., Thun, M., Heath Jr, C., & Doll, R. (1996). Mortality from smoking worldwide. *British Medical Journal*, 52, 12-21.
- 7 World Health Organization (2002). *The World Health Report 2002: Reducing risks, promoting health lifestyles*. (<http://www.who.int/whr/2002/en/>, retrieved October, 2008).