

New Survey Shows Smokers Still Unaware Of Smoking Risk

While smokers are aware that smoking can lead to serious health problems such as lung cancer, many underestimate the risks of getting the disease from smoking. The survey found that two out of three smokers underestimate the chance of developing lung cancer compared to a non-smoker and four in 10 incorrectly believe that developing lung cancer depends more on genes than anything else. Furthermore, the survey found that up to a third of smokers mistakenly believe that activities such as exercise and taking vitamins can "undo" most of the effects of smoking.

Misperceptions about the effects of nicotine found in cigarettes remain at the forefront. Nearly 85 percent of survey respondents either were unsure or incorrectly believe that nicotine caused cancer, emphysema or heart attacks.

Nicotine-related misperceptions can prevent consideration and appropriate use of smoking cessation aids such as nicotine replacement therapies (NRT). While smoking has been proven to cause cancer, heart disease and lung disease, NRTs are not known to be associated with any serious harmful effects. In fact, more than 76 percent of smokers surveyed incorrectly believe or were unsure whether NRT products such as the gum, patch and lozenge were just as addictive as cigarettes. Of the smokers in the survey who had previously tried quitting with NRT products, 76 percent were not using it as directed.

"What is alarming about these survey findings is that so many smokers are still so misinformed," said Dr. Cheryl Healton, president and CEO of the American Legacy Foundation. "Proven cessation treatments like nicotine replacement therapy continue to be underutilized and we believe these misperceptions are partly to blame. These findings point to the fact that more needs to be done to educate and inform smokers."

Smoking remains the leading preventable cause of death in the U.S. and currently 44.5 million adults smoke. The only proven way to reduce the threat of tobacco-related disease is to quit smoking, and many smokers need help to quit successfully. About 40 percent make an attempt to quit each year, but about five percent succeed.

For many smokers, quitting smoking requires more than willpower alone. Smokers making a quit attempt should utilize smoking cessation clinics and group support meetings in their communities to help understand what to expect and how to handle the tough situations when quitting. In addition, smokers who use NRT products such as the nicotine gum, patch and lozenge, can double their chances of successfully quitting versus cold turkey. In fact, new research published in a recent issue of Thorax confirms NRT helps "real-world" smokers quit by doubling the odds of successfully quitting long-term and support the findings of more than 100 other randomized clinical trials.

By: Wendy Mitchell

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