

Cut Down or Quit?

Smoking cessation, not reduction, reduces heart disease

We all know smoking is bad for you. But cutting back helps, right? Just having a couple a day isn't so bad, is it? This study answers that question at least as far as heart attacks and strokes are concerned. If you or someone you care about smokes, you will want to read this article.

Abstract

- Aims: The aim of this study was to assess the association of smoking cessation and reduction with risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD).
- Methods and results: A total of 897 975 current smokers aged ≥40 years who had undergone two consecutive national health examinations (in 2009 and 2011) were included. Participants were classified as quitters (20.6%), reducers I ($\geq 50\%$ reduction, 7.3%), reducers II (20–50% reduction, 11.6%), sustainers (45.7%), and increasers ($\geq 20\%$ increase, 14.5%). During 5 575 556 person-years (PY) of follow-up, 17 748 stroke (3.2/1000 PY) and 11 271 myocardial infarction (MI) (2.0/1000 PY) events were identified. Quitters had significantly decreased risk of stroke [adjusted hazard ratio (aHR) 0.77 95% confidence interval (CI) 0.74–0.81; absolute risk reduction (ARR) −0.37, 95% CI −0.43 to −0.31] and MI (aHR 0.74, 95% CI 0.70–0.78; ARR −0.27, 95% CI −0.31 to −0.22) compared to sustainers after adjustment for demographic factors, comorbidities, and smoking status. The risk of stroke and MI incidence in reducers I (aHR 1.02, 95% CI 0.97–1.08 and aHR 0.99, 95% CI 0.92–1.06, respectively) and reducers II (aHR 1.00, 95% CI 0.95–1.05 and aHR 0.97, 95% CI 0.92–1.04, respectively) was not significantly different from the risk in sustainers. Further analysis with a subgroup who underwent a third examination (in 2013) showed that those who quit at the second examination but had starting smoking again by the third examination had 42–69% increased risk of CVD compared to sustained quitters.
- Conclusions: Smoking cessation, but not reduction, was associated with reduced CVD risk. Our study emphasizes the importance of sustained quitting in terms of CVD risk reduction.

This is a large retrospective study comparing the incidence of heart disease and stroke in smokers who quit, reduced smoking, sustained smoking, and increased their smoking. People who quit smoking reduced their risk of stroke by 37% and heart attack by 27% as compared to people who continued to smoke. People who reduced the amount but continued to smoke didn't have any significant difference in their risk of strokes or heart attacks as compared to people who didn't change their habits. People who quit for a while but took smoking back up increased their risk of cardiovascular disease by 42–69% as compared to people who maintained smoking cessation.

People often work up to quitting smoking by cutting back. While this can be an effective way for some people to change their habits, this study shows how important it is to finish the job and completely quit. It also points out the dangers of people who quit for a time starting back smoking. These people end up with the same risk of heart attack and stroke as the people who never quit. If you are a smoker, it's never too late to quit. If you have been cutting back, work on finishing the job and stop completely.

Smoking Cessation, but not Reduction, Reduces Cardiovascular Disease Incidence. Eur Heart J 2021 Aug 25;[EPub Ahead of Print], SM Jeong, KH Jeon, DW Shin, K Han, D Kim, SH Park, MH Cho, CM Lee, KW Nam, SP Lee.

