Cigarette smoking and the risk of diabetes in women.

The Harvard community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citation</th>
<th>Tonstad, Serena. 2009. 'Cigarette smoking, smoking cessation, and diabetes.' Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice 85, 1: 4-13. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.diabres.2009.04.013">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.diabres.2009.04.013</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citable link</td>
<td><a href="http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:41254612">http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:41254612</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms of Use</td>
<td>This article was downloaded from Harvard University’s DASH repository, WARNING: This file should NOT have been available for downloading from Harvard University’s DASH repository.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cigarette Smoking and the Risk of Diabetes in Women

Eric B. Rimm, ScD, JoAnn E. Manson, MD, Meir J. Stampfer, MD, Graham A. Colditz, MBBS, Walter C. Willett, MD, Bernard Rosner, PhD, Charles H. Hennekens, MD, and Frank E. Speizer, MD

ABSTRACT

Objectives. Noninsulin-dependent diabetes mellitus, a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease, is prevalent in more than 12 million Americans. A voluminous amount of data demonstrates that cigarette smoking is an important cause of cancer and coronary heart disease. However, the association between cigarette smoking and the risk of diabetes is virtually unexplored, especially in women.

Methods. We examined the association between smoking and the incidence of noninsulin-dependent diabetes mellitus among 114 247 female nurses who were free of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer in 1976. We collected exposure information and disease status prospectively for 12 years from biennially self-administered questionnaires.

Results. Current smokers had an increased risk of diabetes, and we observed a significant dose-response trend for higher risk among heavier smokers. During 1 277 589 person-years of follow-up, 2333 women were clinically diagnosed with diabetes. The relative risk of diabetes, adjusted for obesity and other risk factors, was 1.42 among women who smoked 25 or more cigarettes per day compared with nonsmokers.

Conclusions. These data suggest that cigarette smoking may be an independent, modifiable risk factor for noninsulin-dependent diabetes mellitus. (Am J Public Health. 1993;83:211–214)

Introduction

Cigarette smoking decreases fasting insulin levels and causes a transient increase in blood glucose levels after an oral glucose challenge.1,2 Cigarette smoking is also associated with a greater waist-to-hip ratio,3,4 a measure of fat distribution that is related to diabetes.5,6 However, the epidemiological data relating smoking to the development of diabetes are limited. In a 25-year prospective study among 841 middle-aged Dutch men,7 controlled for age, subscapular skinfold, resting heart rate, alcohol, and energy intake, the relative risk (RR) of diabetes was 3.3 (95% confidence interval [CI] = 1.4, 7.9) among men smoking more than 20 cigarettes per day compared with never smokers. However, control for relative weight, family history of diabetes, and physical activity was not complete. In two other relatively small studies, no relation was seen between smoking and diabetes.8,9 To determine whether an association between smoking and noninsulin-dependent diabetes mellitus exists in women after controlling for known risk factors, we examined this relationship prospectively among 114 247 participants in the Nurses’ Health Study.

Methods

The Nurses’ Health Study cohort was established in 1976 when 121 700 female registered nurses, aged 30 to 55 years and living in 11 US states, returned a mailed questionnaire. Every 2 years, participants are mailed follow-up questionnaires to update information on cigarette smoking and other risk factors and to ascertain newly diagnosed diseases. In 1980, we collected data on physical activity and alcohol consumption.10

Among the 121 700 women originally enrolled in this study, 114 247 were free from diabetes, coronary heart disease, and cancer in 1976. We mailed a supplementary questionnaire to women who reported a diagnosis of diabetes mellitus on any follow-up questionnaire. We defined cases of diabetes as being confirmed if one of the following conditions was reported on the supplementary questionnaire: (1) one or more classic symptoms (thirst, polyuria, weight loss, hunger, pruritus) plus an elevated fasting (≥ 140 mg/dL) or random (≥ 200 mg/dL) plasma glucose level; (2) on separate occasions, at least two elevated plasma glucose levels (fasting ≥ 140 mg/dL or random ≥ 200 mg/dL, or 200 mg/dL after 2 hours or more on glucose tolerance testing) in the absence of symptoms; or (3) treatment with a hypoglycemic medication. We excluded 63 cases of insulin-dependent diabetes and 7 women with gestational diabetes only. Further details of the classification of diabetes can be found elsewhere.11,12

The validity of diabetes confirmation was documented with a random sample of participants reporting diabetes mellitus. Out of a sample of 84 women with con-
firmed diabetes by supplementary ques-
tionnaire, 71 provided permission to ob-
tain medical records and 62 of those (87%) had medical records available. Upon re-
view of these records, an endocrinologist (J. E. M.), blinded to information on the 
supplementary questionnaire, was able to 
confirm a diagnosis of diabetes in 61 of the 
62 women (98.4%).

Person-months of follow-up were ac-
cumulated for each risk factor, and risk 
factor status was updated every 2 years. 
For example, if a woman was smoking 
one pack of cigarettes per day in 1976, 
stopped in 1978, and was subsequently 
diagnosed with diabetes in 1984, she would 
contribute 2 years of person-time (1976 to 
1978) to the 15 to 24 cigarettes-per-day 
category and 6 years of person-time (1978–1984) to the past smoking category. 
Because she was diagnosed with diabetes 
while being a past smoker, her diagnosis is 
counted in the incidence rate for past 
smokers, not current smokers. Women 
accumulated person-time of exposure un-
til the date of diabetes, cancer, heart dis-
ease diagnosis, or death. Relative risks 
were calculated as the rate of disease 
among the exposed (total number of cases 
among smokers or past smokers divided 
by the total person-time of exposure) di-
vided by the rate of disease among the 
nonexposed (total number of cases among 
nonsmokers divided by the total non-
smoking person-time). We calculated 
these risks by using the Mantel-Haenszel 
summary statistic to adjust for deciles of 
body mass index (kilograms/square 
metres) and 5-year age intervals. We also 
calculated 95% confidence intervals and, 
where applicable, Mantel extension 
tests\textsuperscript{13,14} for trend across increasing dos-
age levels among current smokers. Cox 
proportional hazard models were used to 
control simultaneously for potential con-
founders.\textsuperscript{15}

**Results**

Average age did not differ materially 
among women who were never smokers, 
past smokers, or current smokers. How-
ever, smokers did have a lower body mass 
index, lower frequency of a family history of 
diabetes, higher alcohol consumption, 
and reduced physical activity (Table 1). 
The distribution of characteristics were 
similar among the nondiabetic population. 
During 1 277 589 person-years of follow-
up, we confirmed 2333 incident cases of 
noninsulin-dependent diabetes mellitus. 
The age- and relative weight-adjusted 
relative risk of this disease among women 
smoking 25 or more cigarettes, compared 
with never smokers, was 1.37 (95% 
CI = 1.16, 1.62) (Table 2). The test for 
trend was also significant among smokers 
($P$ trend = .005), indicating a dose-re-
response association between number of 
cigarettes smoked and risk of the disease.

We previously found moderate in-
verse associations between physical ac-

tivity,\textsuperscript{11} specific nutrient intakes,\textsuperscript{16} alcohol 
consumption,\textsuperscript{17} and the risk of subsequent 
diabetes. Because information on diet, al-
cohol intake, and physical activity was 
first collected on the 1980 follow-up ques-
tionnaire, only incident cases after the 
return date of the 1980 questionnaire (n = 1578) were included in the multivari-
ate models controlling for these and other 
risks factors (see Table 2). The multivariate 
relative risk of noninsulin-dependent dia-
abetes mellitus among women smoking 25 
or more cigarettes per day was 1.42 (95% 
CI = 1.18, 1.72) compared with never 
smokers. The relative risk of the disease 
was intermediate among past smokers 
(\textit{RR} = 1.10; 95% CI = 1.00, 1.20). Rela-
tive risk estimates for smokers versus 
nonsmokers were not appreciably altered 
when total energy, energy-adjusted vege-
table fat, potassium, calcium, magnesium, 
or self-reported hypertension were added 
to the statistical model. In addition, the 
40% increase in risk of the disease among 
women smoking 25 or more cigarettes per 
day compared with never smokers was 
not affected when newly diagnosed cases 
of noninsulin-dependent diabetes mellitus 
who also had incident coronary heart dis-
 ease, cancer, or stroke diagnosed in the 
same 2-year time interval were excluded.

Bias may occur if smokers experi-
ence an increase in other adverse health 
effects that heighten physician surveil-
lance for diabetes and other medical con-
ditions. Smokers did not have a larger 
number of physician visits (Table 1), even 
after the number of visits among the 
diabetes-free population during the 12-year 
follow-up period was tabulated. To reduce 
the potential for bias further, we calculated 
relative risk estimates of noninsulin-depen-
dent diabetes mellitus among smokers, us-
ing only incident symptomatic cases of 
diabetes ($n = 1655$) and adjusting for age 
and body mass index. The relative risk of 
the disease was 1.41 (95% CI = 1.15, 1.72) 
among women smoking 25 or more ciga-
rettes per day compared with never smok-
ers (Table 2). Furthermore, after taking al-
cohol consumption into account (data
available only after June 1, 1980), the multivariate relative risk was not appreciably different for the smaller subset of symptomatic cases (n = 1112) diagnosed after June 1, 1980 (RR = 1.49; 95% CI = 1.19, 1.87) (Table 2).

Obesity only slightly modified the association between smoking and diabetes. Among women with a body mass index not greater than 29.0 kg/m², the age- and obesity-adjusted relative risk of noninsulin-dependent diabetes mellitus was 1.23 (95% CI = 0.87, 1.74) for women smoking 25 or more cigarettes per day compared with never smokers (data not shown). Among women with a body mass index greater than 29.0 kg/m², the age- and obesity-adjusted relative risk of the disease was 1.40 (95% CI = 1.11, 1.75) for the same smoking level compared with never smokers.

### Discussion

In these prospectively collected data, we observed a positive association between smoking and the risk of diabetes. The risk was more pronounced after we controlled for established predictors of the disease; it increased linearly with the number of cigarettes smoked and was only slightly modified by obesity.

Because overall follow-up of this cohort involved more than 90% of original respondents, the results are unlikely to be biased by losses to follow-up. As many as 50% of diabetes cases are undiagnosed; consequently, biased surveillance among smokers could theoretically inflate the diagnosis rate in these groups. However, because smoking is not related to the number of physician visits (Table 1), biased surveillance is unlikely to explain the elevated risk of diabetes among smokers.

Furthermore, restricting the outcome to symptomatic cases of diabetes does not appreciably alter the magnitude of the association. Previously, we reported a strong association between relative weight and incident diabetes. Even after controlling for deciles of relative weight, residual confounding may exist among the top deciles where the increased relative risk of diabetes is more than 20 times that for women in the lowest decile. However, because smoking is inversely related to body mass index, residual confounding by relative weight, if anything, attenuates the association between smoking and diabetes. Therefore, our results may reflect an underestimate of the association between smoking and noninsulin-dependent diabetes mellitus.

In one other study, an association between smoking and diabetes was observed among men in the Zutphen study; however, no association was seen in two others. Feskens and Kromhout followed 841 middle-aged men for 25 years and documented 58 new cases of diabetes. After they controlled for age, subcapsular skinfold, resting heart rate, alcohol, and energy intake, the relative risk of developing diabetes was 3.3 (95% CI = 1.4, 7.9) among men smoking 20 cigarettes per day compared with nonsmokers. Wilson et al. followed 1320 women for 8 years in the Framingham Heart Study and found that, among the 38 new cases of diabetes, the baseline rate of smoking did not differ from that in the reference population of nondiabetics after controlling for age, body mass index, lipoprotein profile, blood pressure, and diuretic use. Similarly, in a 5-year follow-up of 8688 men in the Israeli Ischemic Heart Disease Project, Medalie et al. reported no increased risk of diabetes among current smokers as compared with nonsmokers after controlling for age, body mass index, peripheral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2—Cigarette Smoking and Risk of Noninsulin-Dependent Diabetes among 114 247 US Women, during 12 Years of Follow-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cases</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-14 Cig/Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24 Cig/Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 or More Cig/Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P Trend</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^aSample was of registered nurses, 30 to 55 years of age and free from cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes at baseline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^bThe test for trend is calculated across increasing categories of smoking for current smokers only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^cThirty-five cases had missing smoking information in 1978 and were excluded from person-month analysis for the first follow-up period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^dMultivariate analysis controlling for age (5-year age groups), body mass index (deciles), family history of diabetes, menopause, postmenopausal hormone use (never, past, current), oral contraceptive use (never, past, current), alcohol (0, 0.1-4.9, 5.0-14.9, 15.0-24.9, 25+ g/day), and physical activity (0, 1, 2, 3, 4+ physical activity episodes/wk).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

February 1993, Vol. 83, No. 2
vascular disease, cholesterol, blood pressure, uric acid, hemoglobin, country of birth, and educational status. Previous studies have been small and have controlled for only three or four obesity categories and not for family history of diabetes, physical activity, and alcohol intake (except for the Zutphen study).7 Therefore, the association between smoking and diabetes in these studies may have been missed.

Although smoking is generally inversely associated with body mass index, Shimokata et al.3 reported an increase in the waist-to-hip ratio among men who started smoking; this increase was noted despite the subjects' weight loss. Among women, smoking may have an "anti-estrogenic" effect, causing adverse changes in the waist-to-hip ratio.3,22,23 An increased waist-to-hip ratio, a marker of the ratio of intra-abdominal to subcutaneous fat, has been shown to be significantly positively correlated with insulin resistance,24 plasma glucose levels (after oral glucose load),25 and overt diabetes.2,5 Therefore, the effect of smoking on the development of diabetes may be mediated through alterations in fat distribution. Smoking may also be directly toxic to pancreatic tissue. The risk of pancreatic cancer is elevated among smokers26,27 and the diabetic population.27,28 Thus, biological mechanisms that explain the association between smoking and diabetes may also play a role in development of pancreatic cancer. Further investigation of the interrelationships between smoking, relative weight, and fat distribution and the subsequent development of diabetes is needed to help clarify these mechanisms.

In conclusion, after controlling for known predictors of diabetes, we found a moderate association between smoking and the subsequent risk of diabetes. Our findings from this large prospective cohort of women provide new evidence that cigarette smoking may be a modifiable risk factor that could be targeted for diabetes prevention.

Acknowledgments
This study was supported by research grants DK36796 and CA40356 from the National Institutes of Health. Eric Rimm was supported by a National Institute of National Research Service Award 5T32 CA00680. The authors thank the participants of the Nurses' Health Study for their continued cooperation and participation. The authors are also indebted to Mark Shneyder, Karen Corsano, Gary Chase, Maureen Ireland, and Steven Stuart for their expert and unfailing assistance.

References