

Smoking Is the Hitler of Epidemiology



By Alex Berezow — September 25, 2017

Over-the-top rhetoric is not only prevalent in our political dialogue, it is also commonly adopted by epidemiologists and journalists. Instead of Hitler, they compare anything they dislike to smoking.



Credit: Tomasz Sienicki/Wikipedia ^[1]

Smoking really is as bad as everybody says it is.

A person's chance of getting lung cancer depends on how many years one has smoked, as well as how many cigarettes one has smoked per day. In general, according to the [International Journal of Cancer](#) ^[2], smoking makes a man nearly 24 times more likely to get lung cancer and a woman almost 8 times more likely. Put another way, smoking increases a man's risk of lung cancer by 2,300% and a woman's by 700%.

Lung cancer isn't the only thing a smoker needs to worry about. Smoking is linked to several different cancers, and it damages the cardiovascular, respiratory, and immune systems. Indeed, as the [National Cancer Institute](#) ^[3] writes, "Smoking has been found to harm nearly every bodily organ and organ system in the body and diminishes a person's overall health."

Smoking, therefore, has no redemptive qualities and is completely bad. Just like Adolf Hitler.

Smoking Is the Hitler of Epidemiology

Public health campaigns have rightly stigmatized tobacco. Today, there isn't a single American who thinks smoking is healthy. Even smokers admit their habit might kill them. Because of this,

smoking and tobacco have become very emotionally charged terms.

Again, just like Hitler, emotionally charged words tend to be abused. In recent years, U.S. Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump have been compared to Hitler. Vladimir Putin and Angela Merkel? Both modern-day Hitlers. Your humble correspondent has been [called a Nazi](#) [4] for supporting the use of biotechnology to help mothers with mitochondrial disease bear healthy children.

This ridiculous tactic of comparing any politician one dislikes to Hitler trivializes the crimes against humanity committed by that madman. Unless the conversation is about Joseph Stalin, Pol Pot, or Chairman Mao, there is no human being from history or alive today that is even remotely like Hitler.

Yet, not only is this over-the-top rhetoric prevalent in our political dialogue, it is also commonly adopted by epidemiologists, public health officials, and journalists. Instead of Hitler, they compare anything they dislike to smoking. Consider this headline from [Newsweek](#) [5]:

Newsweek

U.S.

STANDING AT WORK IS JUST AS UNHEALTHY AS SMOKING CIGARETTES DAILY, STUDY SAYS

BY **CHRIS RIOTTA** ON 9/19/17 AT 5:02 PM

Or this one from the [Huffington Post](#) [6]:

HUFFPOST



THE BLOG

Sitting Is the New Smoking: Ways a Sedentary Lifestyle Is Killing You

By **The Active Times**

09/29/2014 10:32 am ET | **Updated** Nov 26, 2014

Or this one from [The Guardian](#) [7]:

Processed meats rank alongside smoking as cancer causes – WHO

UN health body says bacon, sausages and ham among most carcinogenic substances along with cigarettes, alcohol, asbestos and arsenic

To review, sitting, standing, and eating bacon are all just like Hitler smoking cigarettes.

One need not be a PhD scientist to understand just how ludicrous all of these headlines are. It's perfectly fine to sit, stand, and eat bacon, assuming all are done in moderation. And if a person decided to sit around the house all day and eat nothing but bacon, even that wouldn't be nearly as bad as smoking. Pretending otherwise trivializes the truly devastating impact of smoking on the human body.

Worse, such comparisons prevent people from engaging in less harmful behavior. If smokers all gave up tobacco and switched to e-cigarettes, the world would be a much healthier place. But in cities like Seattle, the public health department has decided to [compare e-cigarettes to Hitler smoking cigarettes](#) [8], a policy that, without a doubt, will kill smokers.

For science and health communication to be effective, it cannot engage in hyperbole. When people discover they are being lied to, they quickly tune out.

Anyone who disagrees with that is literally worse than Hitler.

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Links

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smoking#/media/File:Papierosa_1_ubt_0069.jpeg

[2] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3296911/table/T1/>

[3] <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/tobacco/cessation-fact-sheet#q2>

[4] <http://www.clmagazine.org/article/science-and-its-discontents-how-bad-faith-hijacks-science-and-what-good-faith-can-do-about-it/>

[5] <http://www.newsweek.com/standing-desks-unhealthy-sitting-work-will-kill-you-667829>

[6] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/the-active-times/sitting-is-the-new-smokin_b_5890006.html

[7] <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/oct/26/bacon-ham-sausages-processed-meats-cancer-risk-smoking-says-who>

[8] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/08/28/if-seattle-smokers-follow-king-countys-health-advice-they-will-die-11754>