

Fewer lung cancer deaths among women, but smoking toll keeps rising

By ACSH Staff — April 1, 2011

In a survey asking approximately 250,000 people about their current and past smoking habits, researchers [learned](#) [1] that smoking causes half a million deaths annually in the U.S. — an increase from the prior estimates of about 450,000 deaths. To put this in perspective, about 2.5 million Americans die each year from all-cause mortality, indicating that smoking-related deaths account for approximately 20 percent of all fatalities. Published in the journal *Epidemiology*, researchers from the Center for Global Health Research at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto enrolled study participants between 2002 and 2006 and tracked them for two to nine years following survey completion.

Amid the somber statistics, a different report conducted by the American Cancer Society [found](#) [2] that women's death rates from lung cancer have decreased by just under 1 percent per year, which follows a similar pattern of disease decline observed in men more than a decade ago. These changes occurred because during the 1960s and 1970s, men quit smoking at a higher rate than women, and women's smoking rates therefore continued to rise. ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross adds, "The increased death toll from cigarettes is likely coming from chronic lung and cardiovascular diseases."

This year, over 159,000 U.S. adults are expected to die from lung cancer, and approximately 70,500 of those deaths will occur in women.

Even if only a small decline, ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan is happy to note that lung cancer is striking fewer women. "This is a direct result of the fact that fewer women and men today smoke cigarettes," she says, noting a recent study in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* finding that 7 percent of U.S. adults were heavy smokers in 2007, compared to 23 percent in 1965.

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[1] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/03/31/us-smoking-deaths-idUSTRE72U4E220110331>

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