

Lighting up tied to skin cancer

By ACSH Staff — June 19, 2012

A recent study published in the *Archives of Dermatology* is giving smokers another reason to quit: cigarette smoking has been associated with an increased risk of a type of skin cancer called squamous cell carcinoma.

Researchers from the University of Nottingham in England conducted a meta-analysis that included 25 observational studies and found that current smokers had a 50 percent increased risk of squamous cell skin cancer. Among those who had already kicked the habit, the increased risk of the disease was still present, but at a reduced rate of about 20 percent.

Yet when it came to other skin cancer types, such as basal cell carcinoma or the most dangerous type, melanoma, the link to smoking was not as clear: some studies had identified a direct association, while other results were inconclusive.

Researchers are calling on physicians to use these findings as an opportunity to screen smoking patients for skin cancer more aggressively. As author Dr. Jo Leonardi-Bee points out, Early diagnosis can improve prognosis because early lesions are simpler to treat compared with larger or neglected lesions. And while squamous cell skin cancer does not usually spread to other organs, it is often locally invasive and, if not removed early on, can cause serious disfigurement. Rarely, it can metastasize and become life-threatening.

Squamous cell carcinoma is one of the most common forms of skin cancer, and one of the most common cancer diagnoses in the U.S., ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross points out. He notes that the correlation between squamous cell skin cancer and smoking is discussed in a classic 2003 ACSH publication, *Cigarettes: What the Warning Label Doesn't Tell You*. The fact that smokers were 50 percent more likely to develop this type of skin cancer is yet one more reason to quit cigarettes or better still, to never start. As if more reasons were necessary.

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