Letters from Readers

By ACSH Staff — October 1, 1992

An ex-smoker, I nevertheless am curious as to the data and source thereof for the statistical cautions about smoking.

Priorities (spring, 1992) contained a reprint of one of Dr. Whelan's editorials against cigarette advertising which stated that cigarette smoking kills 1,300 Americans each day, or about 475,000 people per year.

It is my impression that total annual deaths in the U.S. number about one percent of the population, or 2.5 million from all causes. With only about 25 percent of the population now smoking, down from an all-time high of about 40 percent, it is hard to visualize how a habit which might have, on the average, involved 30 percent of the living population at one time or another could be responsible for 20 percent of all deaths today.

As a retired food industry professional, I know I can trust ACSH to have a credible basis for its articles. Please enlighten me.

Daniel C. Lucas
Hendersonville, NC

Dr. Whelan responds:

Our latest figures indicate that about two million Americans die each year from all causes. We estimate the 25 percent of that total is causally related to tobacco use. This estimate is derived by comparing expected versus observed deaths among smokers and non-smokers and calculating excess deaths attributable to smoking. This estimate is consistent with hard data from Oregon the first state to require that cigarette smoking be listed as a cause of death on death certificates which reported that 25 percent of deaths were caused by smoking (Tobacco and Oregonians, Oregon Department of Human Resources, Health Division, Office of Epidemiology and Health Statistics, March 1992).

Remember, while "only" 25 percent of Americans now smoke, the percentage was considerably higher 10, 20, 30 years ago. Those smokers are dying now.

In 1992, we estimate that 40 percent of all cancer deaths are caused by cigarette smoking.

Yes, the numbers are indeed incredible but there they are, and we still tolerate this lethal habit indeed we allow nearly four billion dollars to be spent annually advertising it.

Elizabeth M. Whelan, Sc.D., M.P.H.
President, ACSH

Editor's note: ACSH's booklet Smoking or Health...It's Your Choice discusses in detail the vast array of smoking-related diseases and gives information on smoking cessation techniques. (See the inside back cover for ordering information.)
Your comments about Simplesse ("Fat Replacers and Your Future" *Priorities*, spring 1992), our all-natural fat substitute, are accurate with the exception of the statement that, "Simplesse cannot be used in foods that are exposed to high temperatures, as in baking." It is true that Simplesse cannot be used as a vehicle for sustained high-temperature heat transfer, as in frying, but it can be used in manufacturing processes such as canning, pasteurization and ultra-high temperature exposure, plus home preparation such as baking and microwave cooking. It can also be added to hot foods (as a whitener in coffee or in a sauce for hot pasta).

Robert Moser, M.D.
*The NutraSweet Company*

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**Congratulations**

Stephen S. Sternberg, M.D., of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and a member of ACSH's Board of Directors, has received First Place in the Physicians category of the American Medical Writers Association 1992 Medical Book Awards Competition for his book, Histology for Pathologists, published by Raven Press.

The Environmental Division of the American Public Health Association has chosen ACSH President, Dr. Elizabeth Whelan as the 1992 recipient of the Calver Award to honor her work in the environmental and public health field. The Award will be presented on November 10, 1992 in Washington, D.C. at the Association's annual meeting. Past recipients include Dr. Irving Selikoff and Eula Bingham.

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