

Smoking linked to painful periods

Women who smoke are at higher risk of experiencing painful periods. Women who started smoking by age 13 are 60% more likely to have ongoing period pain than women who have never smoked. Women who stopped smoking sometimes experienced reduced period pain; however, they still suffered period pain at a higher rate than those who had never smoked.

What is this research about?

Dysmenorrhoea (period pain) is a common gynaecological problem, affecting up to 91 per cent of women of reproductive age. Smoking has been identified as a possible risk factor for period pain in the past. The aim of this study was to investigate the association between smoking status and period pain in young women over a 12 year time period.



What did the researchers do?

More than 9000 young women (born 1973-78) in the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, were surveyed approximately every three years between 2000 and 2012. Researchers looked at period pain reported by these women. These findings were divided into four groups:

- i) no period pain
- ii) late onset period pain
- iii) recovering from period pain over time
- iv) continued period pain.

These groups were then cross-matched with whether the women smoked, and if so, at what age they started smoking.

What did the research find?

The study found that 29 per cent of smokers suffered from dysmenorrhoea (painful periods) compared to 23 per cent of non-smokers. While it is relatively common for most women to experience painful periods at least sometimes, researchers found that women who smoked were more likely to suffer painful periods regularly over many years.

Smokers were 40 per cent more likely to experience ongoing pain throughout the 12-year study period (2000-2012) than non-smokers. Women who started smoking by age 13 were 60 per cent more likely to have ongoing period pain than non-smokers.

The study also found that women who stopped smoking sometimes experienced reduced period pain; however, they still suffered period pain at a higher rate than those who had never smoked.

More research is needed to understand exactly how smoking increases the risk of painful periods, but one reason may be that smoking narrows the blood vessels, which could cause pain. Another theory is that smoking affects hormones or that smoking may be toxic to the ovaries.

How can you use this research?

While the links between smoking and cancer, heart and lung diseases are well known, some young women may dismiss these risks as too far off into the future to worry about now. The findings from this new research may give young women, especially those experiencing painful periods, a more compelling reason to quit smoking now, or not start at all.

Citation:

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