

Wall Street Journal 2/23/79 p18

Lower Tar, Nicotine In Cigaretts May Be Cutting Cancer Risk

Study of Lung Tissues Finds
Fewer Changes in Smokers
Who Have Died Since 1970

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NEW YORK — Cancer researchers reported another bit of circumstantial evidence that the trend to low-tar, low-nicotine cigarettes may be reducing the risk of lung cancer.

Microscopic examination of lung tissues of people who died between 1970 and 1977 continued to find more cancerous and precancerous changes among smokers than nonsmokers. But the number and extent of the changes in the most recently dead smokers were far fewer than those found in a similar study of smokers who died in the late 1950s.

The study found that among two-pack-a-day smokers who died in the 1970s only 2.2% of the lung-tissue samples showed precancerous changes, or about a tenth of the incidence of precancerous changes found in two-pack-a-day smokers who died in the late 1950s.

Sharp Decline

The sharp decline in the incidence of precancerous changes in smokers' lungs coincides with the advent and increasingly wide use of filter-tip and low-tar cigarettes.

"Indeed, the highest tar/nicotine brands on the market today deliver less tar than the lowest tar brand of American cigarettes on the market before 1954," the researchers note in the current issue of the New England Journal of Medicine. "Thus, everyone who has been a habitual smoker for 25 years or longer must be smoking cigarettes with less tar and nicotine than those formerly smoked, and a large portion of smokers have deliberately selected brands with re-

duced tar and nicotine," they said.

The new study of lung tissues buttresses earlier population studies showing that death rates from lung cancer are lower among smokers of low-tar, low-nicotine cigarettes than among smokers of high-tar, high-nicotine cigarettes.

The new study involved pathologist Oscar Auerbach of the Veterans Administration Medical Center in East Orange, N.J., examining microscopically more than 20,000 preserved samples of lung tissue taken from 445 dead men. About half of the men had died between 1955 and 1960 and the other half between 1970 and 1977. Dr. Auerbach, who was kept ignorant of the men's time of death and smoking history, looked for malignant cells and for abnormal changes in cells that are thought to precede the change to malignancy.

Statistical Analysis

Dr. Auerbach's findings were then analyzed statistically by epidemiologist E. Cuyler Hammond and statistician Lawrence Garfinkel, both of the American Cancer Society. All three of the researchers were involved in some of the early studies in the late 1950s and early 1960s that first implicated cigarettes as a cause of lung cancer.

The researchers failed to find any precancerous changes in nonsmokers in either group of men. Among men who smoked less than a pack a day, only 0.1% of the tissue samples of those who died in the 1970s showed precancerous changes compared with 2.6% of the samples from men who died in the 1950s.

Among samples from those who smoked one to two packs a day the number of precancerous changes found dropped to 0.8% in the most recently deceased men compared with 13.2% in those who died in the 1950s.

Cig Safer
Auerbach
Hammond
Garfinkel
Cuyler