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Macular Degeneration Health Center

Smoking May Hurt Eyes

Study Shows Smoking May Make Late Age-Related Macular Degeneration More Likely

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WebMD Medical News

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Aug. 13, 2007 -- The long list of health risks associated with smoking just got a little longer.

New research shows that smokers are more likely than nonsmokers to develop the late stages of age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

AMD is the leading cause of blindness in Western nations, according to researcher Jennifer Tan, MBBS, and colleagues.

Tan works in Sydney, Australia, at the University of Sydney's Centre for Vision Research and Westmead Hospital's ophthalmology department.

Tan's team followed 2,454 Australians aged 49 and older for a decade. Participants got their eyes checked, reported their smoking habits, and completed a survey about their diets at the start, midpoint, and end of the 10-year study.

Most participants -- 51.5% -- were lifelong nonsmokers. An additional 35.5% were former smokers. The remaining 13% were current smokers.

Smoking and AMD

The researchers adjusted the data based on participants' age, sex, and other AMD risk factors. Despite those adjustments, current smokers were four times more likely than nonsmokers to develop late AMD.

On average, smokers developed late AMD when they were nearly 69 years old. That's about five years earlier than nonsmokers.

The study shows no association between smoking and the early stages of age-related macular degeneration.

The data also suggest that low levels of HDL ("good") cholesterol and rarely eating fish may team up with smoking to make late AMD more likely. But that's not certain.

The findings appear in the *Archives of Ophthalmology*.

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