

Exercise Makes Cigarettes Less Attractive To Smokers

ScienceDaily (Oct. 26, 2009) — Exercise can help smokers quit because it makes cigarettes less attractive. A new study from the University of Exeter shows for the first time that exercise can lessen the power of cigarettes and smoking-related images to grab the attention of smokers.

The study is published in the journal *Addiction*.

The study involved 20 moderately heavy smokers, who had abstained from cigarettes for 15 hours before the trial. During two visits to our laboratory participants began by being shown smoking-related and neutral images, and then spent either 15 minutes sitting or exercising on a stationary bike at a moderate intensity. Afterwards, they were again shown the images.

While the participants were shown the images, the research team used the latest eye tracking technology to measure and record their precise eye movements. They were able to show not only the length of time people looked at smoking-related images but also how quickly pictures of cigarettes could grab their attention, compared with non-smoking matched images.

The study showed an 11% difference between the time the participants spent looking at the smoking-related images after exercise, compared with the after sitting. Also, after exercise, participants took longer to look at smoking-related images. Exercise, therefore, appears to reduce the power of the smoking-related images to grab visual attention.

Numerous studies have shown that a single session of light to moderate intensity exercise, for example five-15 minutes of brisk walking, can reduce cravings and responses to smoking cues. This is the first time eye-tracking technology has been used to show that exercise can reduce interest in and salience of smoking cues that, outside the laboratory, may cause lapses and relapse among smokers trying to quit.

Lead author, University of Exeter PhD student Kate Janse Van Rensburg said: "We know that smoking-related images can be powerful triggers for smokers who are abstaining. While we are no longer faced with advertisements for cigarettes, smokers are still faced with seeing people smoking on television, in photographs or in person. We know that this makes it more difficult

for them to quit.

"Because of this, it's very exciting to find that just a short burst of exercise can somewhat reduce the power of such images. It is not clear if longer or more vigorous bouts of exercise have a bigger effect. This study adds to the growing evidence that exercise can be a great help for people trying to give up smoking."

Adapted from materials provided by [University of Exeter](#), via [EurekAlert!](#), a service of AAAS.

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