
Smoking - Strongest Risk Factor for Cardiovascular Disease



The European Society of Cardiology (ESC) has warned that all forms of smoking are bad for the heart. The warning comes just ahead of World No Tobacco Day on 31 May.

“Smoking of all types is still, without any competition, the strongest risk factor for cardiovascular disease. It beats everything. There has been a lot of research over the past 2-3 years which makes us very clear that all tobacco use, including the waterpipe, smokeless tobacco and electronic cigarettes, is simply not good for your health,” said ESC prevention spokesperson Professor Joep Perk.

Studies show that waterpipe smoking or shisha/hookah is associated with even greater toxin exposure. This is mainly because shisha sessions are generally longer and involve more and larger puffs. It is believed that waterpipe puffs lead to 100 times more smoke inhalation as compared to a cigarette.

Prof. Perk says that while electronic cigarettes may be moderately effective in helping smokers quit, they should carry the same marketing restrictions as cigarettes. The ESC advocates that e-cigarettes need to be regulated as a tobacco and medical product. Evidence already indicates that cartridges labelled as containing “no nicotine” may contain nicotine and other toxic substances.

Smoking trends indicate a significant increase in adolescent smoking. Prof. Perk highlights the need to curtail this trend because those who start smoking in their teens start a process of vascular damage that will affect them at a later stage. He points out that parents need to be role models and educators and need to be very strict in ensuring their teenagers do not smoke. In addition, he suggests that there should be stricter controls with respect to the promotional practices of tobacco companies. Smoking should be restricted to people under the age of 18 and should be forbidden in public places including school yards.

The ESC is actively engaged in lobbying for the protection of young people. Its Tobacco Products Directive advocates banning flavours, avoiding trademarks or promotions and introducing plain packaging and displaying health warnings on 75% of the back and front surfaces of packages. It also proposes the need to have age verification systems for retailers with large economic penalties for those who fail to comply, and requiring medicine authorisation for all non-tobacco nicotine containing products.

Prof Perk also talks about the risks associated with passive smoking. A non-smoker living with a smoker has a 30 percent higher risk of cardiovascular disease. Secondary smoke from all sources, including the waterpipe carries a significant risk for cardiovascular disease.

He concluded: “Smoking of all types is the number one villain in the battlefield of cardiovascular disease prevention. Smoking is two times more significant for heart attacks on a population level than nutritional habits, physical activity and other risk factors. Countries that want to get rid of heart attacks should get rid of smoking before even thinking about anything else.”

Source: European Society of Cardiology

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