

Active or Passive Smoking and Breast Cancer Risk

Risk was elevated for smokers and women with intense exposure to passive smoking.

Emerging evidence suggests that active and passive smoking are associated with breast cancer risk. In this report from the prospective cohort component of the Women's Health Initiative, investigators assessed the association between active and passive smoking and risk for invasive breast cancer among 80,000 postmenopausal women (age range, 50–79).

During mean follow-up of 10.3 years, 3520 women developed invasive breast cancer. Compared with never-smokers, former smokers had 9% higher risk and current smokers had 16% higher risk for breast cancer. Breast cancer risk rose with intensity and duration of smoking. Among former smokers, elevated breast cancer risk persisted for up to 20 years after quitting. Compared with women who reported no exposure to passive smoking, women who reported passive smoking exposure of ≥ 10 years as children, ≥ 20 years at home as adults, and ≥ 10 years in the workplace had 32% higher risk for breast cancer. Women who reported less-intense exposures to passive smoking did not have elevated risk. All analyses were adjusted for potential confounders, including alcohol intake.

Comment: These results, which strongly suggest that active smoking and intense exposure to passive smoking raise risk for invasive breast cancer among postmenopausal women, lend support to efforts to prevent smoking, encourage quitting, and restrict exposure to secondhand smoke.

— [Paul S. Mueller, MD, MPH, FACP](#)

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