**Smoking may DOUBLE your risk of developing depression or schizophrenia, scientists warn**

* **Bristol researchers found smoking increases schizophrenia risk by 127 per cent**
* **They also found chances of developing depression almost doubled for smokers**
* **It is believed nicotine hampers dopamine and serotonin receptors in the brain**

By [Jack Elsom For Mailonline](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/search.html?s=&authornamef=Jack+Elsom+For+Mailonline)

Published: 00:15 GMT, 6 November 2019 | Updated: 01:39 GMT, 6 November 2019

Smoking may hike the risk of developing [depression](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/depression/index.html) and schizophrenia, according to a study.

Bristol University experts discovered smokers face almost twice the risk of getting the mental health conditions. The study, conducted on nearly half a million people, adds to the large catalogue of health issues already linked to tobacco. Academics could not prove smoking causes depression or schizophrenia, warning that they only found more evidence to link them.

Results, published in the journal Psychological Medicine, also showed people with the conditions are more likely to start smoking. But the evidence to suggest smoking leads to poor mental health - as opposed to the other way round - was much stronger. Lead author Dr Robyn Wootton and her team believe nicotine hampers dopamine and serotonin receptors in the brain. Dopamine is a naturally occurring chemical and regulates one's emotions, as does serotonin - known as the 'happy chemical' which contributes to wellbeing.

The scientific paper calls for more to be done to help smokers with mental health conditions to stop. Dr Wootton said: 'Individuals with mental illness are often overlooked in our efforts to reduce smoking prevalence, leading to health inequalities. 'Our work shows we should be making every effort to prevent smoking initiation and encourage smoking cessation because of the consequences to mental health as well as physical health.'

The toxicity of tobacco is well established - 'smoking kills' is plastered across every cigarette box by law.

Smoking is known to cause lung cancer, heart disease and type 2 diabetes, among other things. The habit killed 78,000 people in England last year, according to data. And 480,000 people died from smoking in the US last year. Smoking is also the largest single contributor to the average 10 to 20-year reduction in life expectancy among people with mental health conditions.

Dr Wooten and colleagues used UK Biobank data from 462,690 people of European ancestry. All were aged between 40 and 69. Eight per cent of the participants were defined as current smokers, and 22 per cent former smokers. Smoking rates among people with serious mental health conditions are more than 50 per cent higher than in the general population, figures suggest.

Professor Ann McNeill, co-chair of the Mental Health and Smoking Partnership, said: 'Helping people with mental health conditions to quit smoking is the best way to help them live longer. 'While we have seen smoking rates fall dramatically for the population as a whole over the last four decades, we haven't seen the same decline for people with mental health conditions.'

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Earlier this year, the researchers published a study in the British Journal of Psychiatry showing evidence that tobacco smoking increases the risk of bipolar disorder.

### *WHAT IS DEPRESSION?*

*While it is normal to feel down from time to time, people with depression may feel persistently unhappy for weeks or months on end.*

*Depression can affect anyone at any age and is fairly common – approximately one in ten people are likely to experience it at some point in their life.*

*Depression is a genuine health condition which people cannot just ignore or 'snap out of it'.*

*Symptoms and effects vary, but can include constantly feeling upset or hopeless, or losing interest in things you used to enjoy.*

*It can also cause physical symptoms such as problems sleeping, tiredness, having a low appetite or sex drive, and even feeling physical pain.*

*In extreme cases it can lead to suicidal thoughts.*

*Traumatic events can trigger it, and people with a family history may be more at risk.*

*It is important to see a doctor if you think you or someone you know has depression, as it can be managed with* *lifestyle changes, therapy or medication.*

*Source: NHS Choices*

### **Smoking rates among mental health sufferers 'is 50% higher'**

The Bristol study came the same day as a report from Action on Smoking and Health (ASH).

That report calls for more to be done to help smokers with mental health conditions to stop.

Smoking killed 78,000 people in England last year and is the largest single contributor to the average 10-20 year reduction in life expectancy among people with mental health conditions, ASH states.

Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) said smoking rates among people with serious mental health conditions are more than 50 per cent higher than in the general population.

Previous studies looking at this association have been unable to ascertain whether it is a cause-and-effect relationship - and if which direction if so.

The ASH report, funded by Public Health England, found that 82 per cent of surveyed mental health trusts have a comprehensive smokefree policy in place - the Government's target is 100 per cent.

Of the trusts that responded to the report, all offered nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) but only 47 per cent offered the most effective smoking treatment of either combination or varenicline.

n 55 per cent of the trusts, patients were not always asked their smoking status on admission.

Staff accompanied patients on smoking breaks every day in 57 per cent of the trusts despite NICE recommending no staff-supervised or staff-facilitated smoking breaks.

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-7651879/Smoking-raise-risk-depression-schizophrenia-scientists-warn.html