

Passive smoking linked with diabetes for first time

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Breathing in other people's smoke boosts the risk of developing diabetes, a new study suggests.

US researchers examined more than 4500 men and women in Birmingham, Alabama, Chicago and Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Oakland, California.

The volunteers' health and smoking habits were first assessed in 1985, and again 15 years later. The investigators found that during this time, 22% of smokers developed glucose intolerance. This is the precursor to diabetes, when the body can no longer produce enough of the hormone insulin, which regulates blood sugar.

Those who had never smoked, but who were frequently exposed to second-hand smoke came next, with 17% developing glucose intolerance. This was higher than the 14% risk rate in the group of people who had previously smoked and then given up the habit.

Those least at risk were non-smokers who were not exposed to other people's smoke. In this group, 11.5% of people developed glucose intolerance.

Pancreas risk?

The study, led by Thomas Houston of the Birmingham Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Alabama, speculates that toxins from tobacco smoke could accumulate in the pancreas, where insulin is produced, but says further work is needed to confirm this.

Passive smoking has been associated with heart disease and cancer but not, until now, with diabetes.

Recent studies have suggested that passive smoke may contain more dangerous ingredients than previously thought.

Smoke that is released from a cigarette between inhalations is cooler than smoke that is directly inhaled. The chemical reactions which produce this initially un-inhaled smoke mean that some toxins are at higher levels than in the smoke directly inhaled by smokers.

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