



Strong link between smoking and anxiety disorders

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Smokers are at significantly greater risk of suffering from panic attacks, according to new research.

A team from Columbia University in the US studied anxiety disorders among teenagers in New York and found that young smokers were seven times as likely to develop agoraphobia (fear of open spaces).

The youths were interviewed at the age of 16 and again when they reached 22 years old. The youngsters who smoked 20 or more cigarettes a day were 16 times as likely to experience regular panic attacks and over five times more likely to suffer from general personality disorders.

The authors of the study discounted the suggestion that teenagers who experienced anxiety disorders had taken up smoking to calm their nerves. The researchers discovered that teens with anxiety problems at the earlier age were no more likely to develop a smoking habit.

Dr Fenton Howell, Chairman of Action on Smoking and Health, told **irishhealth.com** that the results were unsurprising. "All that smoking does is reduce the stress of nicotine withdrawal. Non-smokers don't experience that kind of stress.

"The so-called calming effect of cigarettes is simply the pharmacological effect of nicotine withdrawal," he explained. "The cravings manifest themselves as stress. We're learning a lot more about nicotine in the last few years, and we're finding that nicotine has many more long-term effects than we previously thought", added Dr Howell.

The research was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association.
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