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Coverage
Great Britain
Theme
Health and Care

More than two-thirds of smokers want to quit

Smoking among adults fell to its lowest level recorded level in 2006 with only a fifth choosing to light up.

And as No Smoking Day approaches (12 March), published ONS figures show more than two thirds (68 per cent) of cigarette smokers in Great Britain said they wanted to kick the habit, but 59 per cent of smokers said it would be difficult to go without smoking for a whole day.

Since 1974, when the General Household Survey started monitoring cigarette smoking, the proportion of smokers has been higher among men than women. In 2006, 23 per cent of men and 21 per cent of women were smokers.

Men also smoke more cigarettes a day on average than women. In 2006, men smoked on average 15 cigarettes a day, compared with 13 a day for women.

The fall of smoking among adults to 22 per cent follows a period of little change in the second half of the 1990s, when the proportion levelled out at about 27 per cent, before resuming a slow decline in the early 2000s.

Distinct patterns of smoking behaviour for people born in different decades of the twentieth century are also apparent from the data collected since the 1970s.

More people born before the 1950s, for example, took up smoking by their early twenties, but large numbers gave up smoking as they aged. This was reflected in the steady fall in the overall prevalence of smoking from the 1970s to the mid-1990s.

In the generation born after the 1960s, fewer young people took up smoking but those that were established smokers by the age of 30 gave up at a slower rate than in the past.

In recent decades the overall fall in smoking prevalence has not been due to established smokers giving up but due to either fewer young people starting to smoke or to new smokers giving up at a younger age, or a combination of these two factors.

Issued by
National Statistics
Government Buildings
Newport NP10 8XG

Telephone
Press Office 01633 456 393
Public Enquiries 0845 601 3034

Internet
www.statistics.gov.uk



At any age, in 2004 men and women smoked less than similarly aged people born in the first half of the twentieth century.

Smoking patterns also vary by socio-economic group. A larger percentage of people living in households headed by a manual worker smoke compared with those living in households headed by a non-manual worker in all birth cohorts.

Among people born between 1956 and 1985, the non-manual group were not only less likely to start smoking than manual groups but also had higher rates of giving up. The vast majority of smokers in the manual group who started smoking remained smokers.

Assuming that the patterns of smoking behaviour observed in the most recent birth cohorts continue, the gap in smoking prevalence between the manual and non-manual groups will not reduce and the overall prevalence of smoking will stabilise or decline slowly.

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. Data presented in this press release were drawn from the following previously published documents:
General Household Survey 2006 at:
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/GHS06/Smokinganddrinkingamongadults2006.pdf and
Health Statistics Quarterly 'Time and generational trends in smoking among men and women in Great Britain, 1972-2004/5' and 'Socio-economic inequalities in smoking: an examination of generational trends in Great Britain' at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/HSQ32.pdf and http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/HSQ34.pdf.
You can also access Smoking Related Attitudes and Behaviour 2006 on <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=1638>
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