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Drinking, Depression, Anxiety linked to Smoking Wisconsin smokers show higher levels of all three

Current smokers are much more likely to report heavy and/or binge drinking than former or never smokers, according to a report just released by the UW Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention (UW-CTRI). Current smokers also are more likely to experience depression and anxiety, according to “Alcohol Use, Depression and Health Among Wisconsin Smokers,” one of a series of reports based on the 2003 Wisconsin Tobacco Survey of more than 8000 Wisconsin adults.

Current smokers were twice as likely as former smokers to engage in heavy drinking (more than 60 drinks per month) and four times as likely as never smokers. A similar pattern was true for heavy binge drinking (three or more binges per month). There were significant gender differences in the amount of drinking among smokers. Male smokers were even more likely than female smokers to report binge drinking—37 percent compared to 13 percent of female smokers. Male smokers also reported more heavy drinking than female smokers—19 percent to 5 percent.

The opposite was true of depression. Current female smokers were twice as likely to report depression as male smokers and 2 ½ times as likely as female never smokers. Anxiety among current female smokers showed a similar pattern.

“These findings are extremely important,” said Dr. Michael Fiore, professor of medicine and UW-CTRI director. “Some of the greatest risks to health—smoking, binge drinking, depression—are often linked and need to be better addressed by healthcare providers.”

The report also examined the relationship of smoking and general health. Researchers found that although smokers were able to assess their health as good, fair or poor and to offer information about particular health conditions, they often did not associate their poor health with smoking. More than 16 percent of current smokers reported fair to poor health compared to 13 percent of former smokers and 10 percent of never smokers. Heavier smokers reported poorer health than moderate or light

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smokers. African Americans were more than twice as likely to report poor health as white smokers. A majority of smokers reported that tobacco has damaged their health: 66 percent. Only 54 percent of people over 65 believed this and fewer women than men believed smoking damaged their health.

Specific areas of damage were more evident. More than 12 percent of current smokers reported chronic bronchitis while only 3 percent of former smokers and 1 percent of never smokers had this condition. Chronic bronchitis and emphysema both result primarily from smoking.

The report recommended increased screening for alcohol use, depression and anxiety among smokers. Researchers also suggested that physicians connect smoking to health conditions when advising patients to quit. The report recommended ready access to treatment, including through quitlines like the Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line (1-877-270-STOP). Further, the report called for more research on African American smokers and those with depression, anxiety and heavy alcohol use.

This paper is based on the 2003 Wisconsin Tobacco Survey conducted with 8111 Wisconsin residents by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center for the UW Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention and UW Comprehensive Cancer Center. The report was funded by the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Copies of the report are available online at www.ctri.wisc.edu and www.tobwis.org or can be obtained by calling 608-262-8673.

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(see graphs on page 3)

Figure 1

**Prevalence of Heavy Drinking
by Smoking Status**

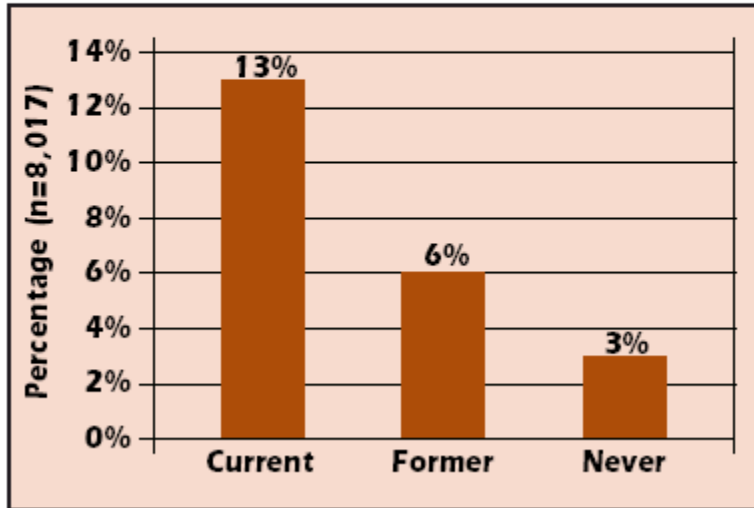


Figure 4

**Prevalence of Depression by
Smoking Status and Gender**

