

Giving up smoking

IT PUSHES UP
STRESS CLAIM
TOBACCO FIRMS

"may damage your health"

People who give up or reduce their smoking may be more likely to die from stress-related causes, the tobacco industry suggested yesterday.

The finding is based on a study of the deaths of male doctors between 1970 and 1972.

Doctors were chosen because it was known that, as a group, they reduced their smoking between 1951 and 1971 more than other men in their social class – from an average of nine to an average of four cigarettes a day.

Research statistician Peter Lee, an occasional smoker himself averaging two cigarettes a week, found that their death rates were indeed lower than for the non-doctor groups – but not by much.

During 1970-2, 665 male doctors 665 male doctors died under age 65. This compared with an expected 699 deaths had they died at the same rate as non-doctors in their social group.

They showed 83 fewer deaths from heart disease, 16 fewer deaths from strokes, and eight fewer deaths from lung cancer.

But these 'savings' were offset by 60 'surplus' deaths from stress related causes – 30 from accidents and poisonings, 26 from suicide and four

from liver disease associated with heavy drinking.

So the overall saving was only 34. And not all this may be due to giving up smoking. Deaths from heart disease were falling faster among doctors than among others in their social class during 1931 – 51 – before they started to drop the smoking habit.

"If a person stops smoking he may do something else, and if this is hazardous to health the risk of other diseases, not necessarily conventionally related to smoking, may rise" Mr Lee writes in the British Medical Journal.

Until recently Mr Lee was research co-ordinator and statistician for the industry sponsored Tobacco Advisory Council. He is now an independent consultant on statistics.