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Postmenopausal Smokers Now Have One Less Excuse Not to Quit

Study based on WHI data confirms effectiveness of physical activity in minimizing weight gain after quitting smoking

CLEVELAND, Ohio (July 11, 2018)—Smokers give lots of reasons for not quitting smoking, with fear of weight gain ranking as one of the most favored, but a new study that followed smokers from the Women’s Health Initiative (WHI) confirms that even modest increases in physical activity can minimize weight gain in postmenopausal women after they have quit smoking. Results are published online today in *Menopause*, the journal of The North American Menopause Society (NAMS).

The findings appear in the article “Physical activity and weight gain after smoking cessation in postmenopausal women.” This is the first known study to evaluate the relationship between physical activity and postcessation weight gain in postmenopausal women. The study followed more than 4,700 baseline smokers from the WHI for 3 years, at which point it was determined that quitters gained an average of 7.7 pounds over those women who continued smoking. Quitters who undertook increased physical activity, defined as more than 15 metabolic equivalent task-hours per week, had the lowest weight gain of 5.6 pounds. Of these, women who were obese experienced the greatest benefit from physical activity compared with women of normal weight.

More promising is the finding that quitters who participated in little physical activity at baseline and then had higher physical activity at year 3 and also enrolled in a dietary modification intervention had nonsignificant weight gain compared with continuing smokers.

“Being active after quitting smoking was found to reduce weight gain regardless of the amount of physical activity before quitting,” says Dr. JoAnn Pinkerton, NAMS executive director. “Although the best results in limiting weight gain after quitting smoking were found in women who engaged in 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week, benefit was also found in less-intense activity, such as walking 90 minutes per week at three miles an hour. A smaller substudy suggests that adding dietary modifications also will help limit weight gain. Hope for those deciding to quit smoking—exercise more and watch food intake to limit weight gain.”

For more information about menopause and healthy aging, visit www.menopause.org.

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Founded in 1989, The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) is North America's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the health and quality of life of all women during midlife and beyond through an understanding of menopause and healthy aging. Its multidisciplinary membership of 2,000 leaders in the field—including clinical and basic science experts from medicine, nursing, sociology, psychology, nutrition, anthropology, epidemiology, pharmacy, and education—makes NAMS uniquely qualified to serve as the definitive resource for health professionals and the public for accurate, unbiased information about menopause and healthy aging. To learn more about NAMS, visit www.menopause.org.