Smoking Increases Risk for Head and Neck Cancers

Atlanta 2007/08/27 -Smoking significantly increases the risk for head and neck cancers for both men and women, regardless of the anatomic site. Published in the October 1, 2007 issue of CANCER, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, a large, prospective study confirmed strong associations between current and past cigarette smoking and malignancies of the head and neck in both genders.

Cancers of the head and neck include cancers of the larynx, nasal passages/nose, oral cavity, and pharynx. Worldwide, more than 500,000 people are diagnosed with these cancers every year. According to the National Cancer Institute (NCI), men are more than three times more likely than women to be diagnosed with head and neck cancer and almost twice as likely to die from their disease. While tobacco use has long been identified as an important risk factor for head and neck cancers, the new study finds that smoking plays a greater role in the development of head and neck cancer in women than men.

Dr. Neal Freedman from the NCI and co-investigators analyzed data from 476,211 men and women prospectively followed from 1995 to 2000 to assess gender differences in risk for cancer in specific head and neck sites. Analysis showed that the risk of smoking leading to any type of head and neck cancer was significantly greater in women than in men. While 45 percent of these cancers could be attributed to smoking in men, 75 percent could be attributed to smoking in women.

“Incidence rates of head and neck cancer were higher in men than in women in all categories examined,” conclude the authors, “but smoking was associated with a larger relative increase in head and neck cancer risk in women than in men.” To reduce the burden of head and neck cancer, public health efforts should continue to aim at eliminating smoking in both women and men.

Article: “Prospective Investigation of the Cigarette Smoking-Head and Neck Cancer Association by Sex,” Neal D. Freedman, Christian C. Abnet, Michael F. Leitzmann, Albert R. Hollenbeck, Arthur Schatzkin, CANCER; Published Online: August 27, 2007, 2007 (DOI: 10.1002/cncr.22957); Print Issue Date: October 1, 2007.

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