

[IMAGE]

## Smoke Signals

The 25% of adults in the U.S. who smoke cigarettes will live an average of five to 10 years less than those who have never smoked. While smokers are still living, their habit can lead to many ongoing problems as well; studies have shown associations between smoking and low back pain and depression.

To determine the link between smoking and the health, duration of pain, and severity of pain in spinal patients, the authors of a recent study appearing in the journal *Spine* examined the initial visits of about 25,000 patients at 23 health care locations. Patients answered questions on work status, symptoms, medical history, mental health, and personal statistics. Practitioners provided clinical information and smoking status of their patients.

Smokers were at least 50% more likely to report severe back pain symptoms and symptoms of depression than nonsmokers. Smokers scored significantly lower than nonsmokers on all diagnostic health categories on a health questionnaire. Also, although smokers suffered spinal symptoms for a similar duration to that of nonsmokers, the smokers' symptoms were more severe and occurred more often each day.

Smoking cigarettes, pipes, or cigars can cause many health problems besides well-known, life-threatening illnesses like lung cancer. For example, smokers deal with congestion, coughing, sleeplessness, and weakened immune systems. If you smoke, try to see these more minor symptoms for what they really are: signals of more severe problems down the road.

### *Reference:*

Vogt MT, Hanscom B, Lauerman WC, et al. Influence of smoking on the health status of spinal patients: The National Spine Network Database. *Spine* 2002;27(3), pp. 313-319.

To find out other causes of back pain, go to <http://www.chiroweb.com/tyh/backpain.html>.

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