

Smoking statistics

ASH Fact Sheet

November 2024

Plain English Summary

About one out of every eight people in the UK smokes (11.9%). The chance that a person is a smoker has been going down ever since 1974, when records began in the UK. The number of cigarettes that smokers smoke has also gone down.

Here are some patterns in smoking in Great Britain:

- Smoking is slightly more common in men than women
- People aged 16-24 and people aged 60 and over are less likely to smoke than people aged 25-59. But older people are more likely to be ex-smokers.
- People in lower-paid jobs are much more likely to smoke than people with higher-paid jobs
- Unemployed people are more likely to smoke than employed people
- More than half of smokers aim to quit
- Nearly a quarter of smokers aim to quit in the next 3 months



Smoking is the biggest cause of death and disease that you can control. About half of all life-long smokers will die early, losing on average about 10 years of life. Most smoking-related deaths arise from one of three types of disease: lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and coronary heart disease (CHD).

Trends in smoking

The highest recorded level of smoking among men in Great Britain was 82% in 1948, with 65% smoking manufactured cigarettes. At that time, significant numbers of men smoked pipes or cigars as well as, or instead of, manufactured cigarettes. By contrast, women have tended to smoke only cigarettes. Smoking prevalence among women in 1948 was 41% and remained constant until the early 1970s, peaking at 45% in the mid-1960s, according to tobacco industry surveys.¹

Overall, the proportion of adults (aged 16 and over) smoking in Great Britain has been declining since 1974 when national government surveys on smoking among adults first began. Since then, smoking has continued to decline, albeit at a slower rate.² The fall in smoking rates is due to a combination of smokers quitting and a growth in the population of people who have never smoked.

In 2023, 11.9% of adults in the UK smoke (Table 1), which means that are about 6.0 million adult cigarette smokers in the United Kingdom.² The proportion of the population who have never smoked has increased from 46.7% in 2011 to 63.2% in 2023.

Table 1. Cigarette Smoking Prevalence, Adults Aged 18 and Over, Countries of the UK (APS), 2023²

England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	UK
11.6%	12.6%	13.5%	13.3%	11.9%

Various methods have been used to measure smoking rates in England, Great Britain and the UK over the years. Data in this factsheet is sourced from three Government surveys: The General Household/General Lifestyle Surveys (GLS),³ the Opinion & Lifestyle Survey (OPN)⁴ and the Annual Population Survey (APS).²

The GLS survey ran from 1974 until 2011. The OPN survey started asking about smoking in 2011, using the same prevalence question and sampling method as the GLS. Both are representative of people aged 16+ in Great Britain.

We also use the Annual Population Survey, which represents people aged 18+ in the UK.² This survey has more demographic detail. The earliest data available from the APS is also from 2011. Government targets are set on the basis of the APS data as this has the largest sample size.

Please note that due to differences in sample size and methodology, overall prevalence figures differ between surveys, though the trends are consistent. Since 2000 data have been weighted. Table 2 shows a comparison of prevalence in the three surveys. Only four-yearly data is shown before 2018, but results are published yearly (or every other year before 2000).

Table 2. Smoking prevalence by survey, 1974-2023^{2,3,4}

%	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
GLS (GB 16+) ³	45.6	40.2	35.3	32.7	30.0	26.8	27.1	25.9	22.0	20.3							
OPN (GB 16+) ⁴											18.8	16.6	15.8	14.5	12.7	11.2	10.5
APS (UK 18+) ²											18.1	14.7	14.1	14.0	13.3	12.9	11.9

See also ASH fact sheet: [Facts at a glance](#)

Types of tobacco smoked

Across Great Britain, since 1990, there has been a steady increase in the number of smokers using mainly hand-rolled tobacco. In 1990, 18% of male smokers and 2% of female smokers said they smoked mainly hand-rolled cigarettes but by 2011 this had risen to 40% and 26% respectively.⁴ The 2018 Opinions & Lifestyle survey revealed that 40.8% of male and 29.9% of female smokers said they only smoked hand-rolled cigarettes.⁴ This is most likely due to the growing unaffordability of ready-made cigarettes, and that smoking is becoming more concentrated among people on low incomes.

Targets to reduce smoking

Periodically, the Government sets targets to reduce smoking prevalence in the population.^{5 6}

In 2023, the Government published 'Stopping the Start: our plan to create a smokefree generation.'⁷

In July 2019, the Government announced its ambition for a Smokefree 2030 (where the overall percentage of the population who smoke is 5% or below) through its consultation document 'Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s'.⁸

In July 2017, the Conservative Minority Government published a Tobacco Control Plan for England, outlining the steps needed to drastically reduce smoking rates by 2022. Its goals included reducing the number of 15 year-olds who smoke regularly from 8% to 3% or below, reducing smoking in adults from 15.5% to 12%, and reducing smoking in pregnancy from 10.7% to 6% or below.⁹

In March 2011 the Coalition Government launched its Tobacco Control Plan for England in which it set out ambitions to reduce adult smoking prevalence to 18.5% or less by 2015 and to reduce smoking among 15 year-olds to 12% or less by 2015.¹⁰

In its strategy paper launched on 1 February 2010, the Labour Government set new targets to reduce smoking among the general population to 10% of adults and to 1% or less among children by 2020.⁶

In the 1998 White Paper 'Smoking Kills' the Government set a target to reduce adult smoking rates to 21% or less by 2010, with a reduction in prevalence among routine and manual groups to 26% or less.¹¹ The target for the general population was achieved in 2007 but not for lower socio-economic groups (28% in 2011).

See also: [Key dates in tobacco regulation](#)

Cigarette smoking by sex

Cigarette smoking is slightly more common among men (13.7%) than women (10.1%), and this difference has been fairly consistent over time.

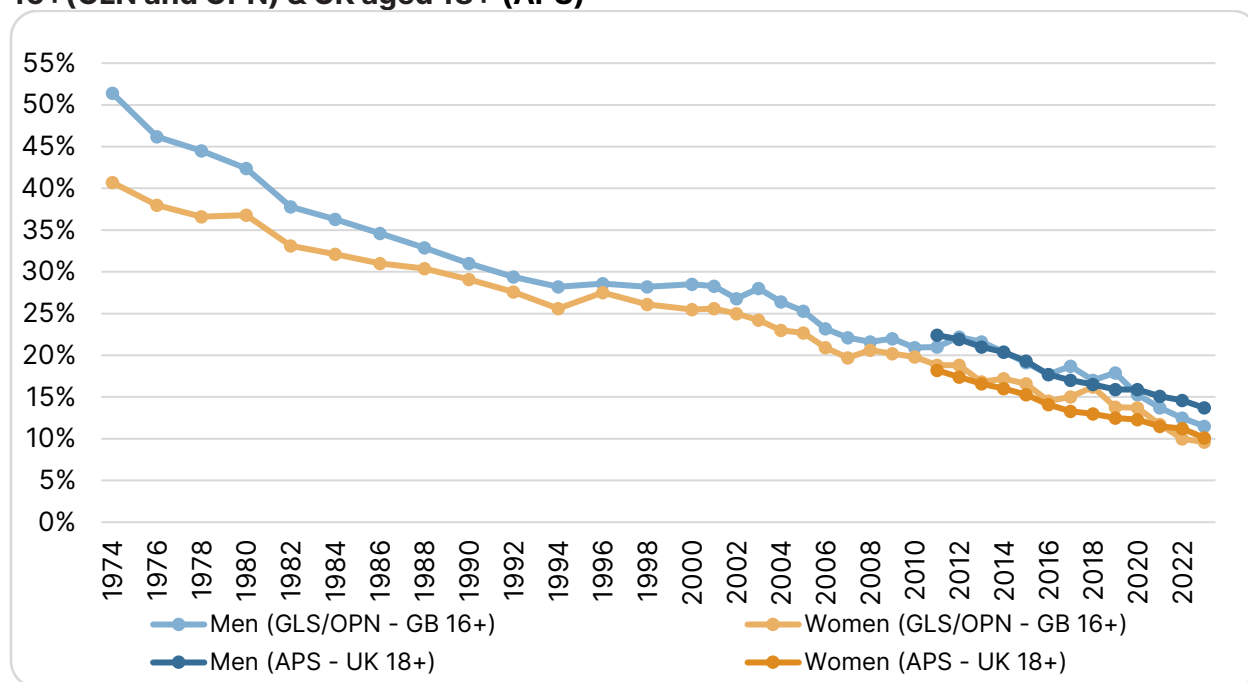
Table 3. Prevalence of cigarette smoking by sex (GLS), 1974-2010, GB age 16+³

%	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Men	51.4	44.5	37.8	34.6	31.0	28.2	28.2	26.8	23.2	20.9
Women	40.7	36.6	33.1	31.0	29.1	25.6	26.1	25.0	20.9	19.8
All	45.6	40.2	35.3	32.7	30.0	26.8	27.1	25.9	22.0	20.3

Table 4. Prevalence of cigarette smoking by sex (APS), 2011-2023, UK age 18+²

%	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Men	22.4	21.9	21.0	20.4	19.3	17.7	17.0	16.5	15.9	15.9	15.1	14.6	13.7
Women	18.2	17.4	16.6	16.0	15.3	14.1	13.3	13.0	12.5	12.3	11.5	11.2	10.1
All	20.2	19.6	18.8	18.1	17.2	15.8	15.1	14.7	14.1	14.0	13.3	12.9	11.9

Figure 1. Prevalence of cigarette smoking by sex and survey 1974-2023, GB age 16+ (GLN and OPN) & UK aged 18+ (APS)^{2,3,4}



Cigarette smoking by region

Smoking prevalence varies slightly by region. In 2023, regional smoking rates range from 10.6% in the South East to 12.7% in Yorkshire and the Humber.

Since 2011, smoking prevalence in the North East and North West has almost halved (48.2% and 46.0% decline, respectively).

Table 5. Prevalence of adult cigarette smoking by region (APS), age 18+ 2023²

Region	Prevalence 2011	Prevalence 2023	% decline 2011 to 2023
East Midlands	20.2%	12.5%	38.2%
East of England	19.3%	11.5%	40.7%
London	19.2%	11.7%	39.0%
North East	21.3%	11.0%	48.2%
North West	21.9%	11.8%	46.0%
South East	18.2%	10.6%	41.8%
South West	18.8%	11.2%	40.3%
West Midlands	19.2%	12.0%	37.7%
Yorkshire and the Humber	21.9%	12.7%	42.1%
England	19.8%	11.6%	41.4%

Note: the % decline column is calculated using unrounded 2011 and 2023 values

Cigarette smoking by age

Since the start of the OPN survey in 2011, smoking has become less common across all age groups.⁴ Smoking is lowest among people aged 60 and over and people aged 16-24. Although people aged 60 and over are more likely than younger people to have ever been smokers, they are also more likely to have stopped smoking.

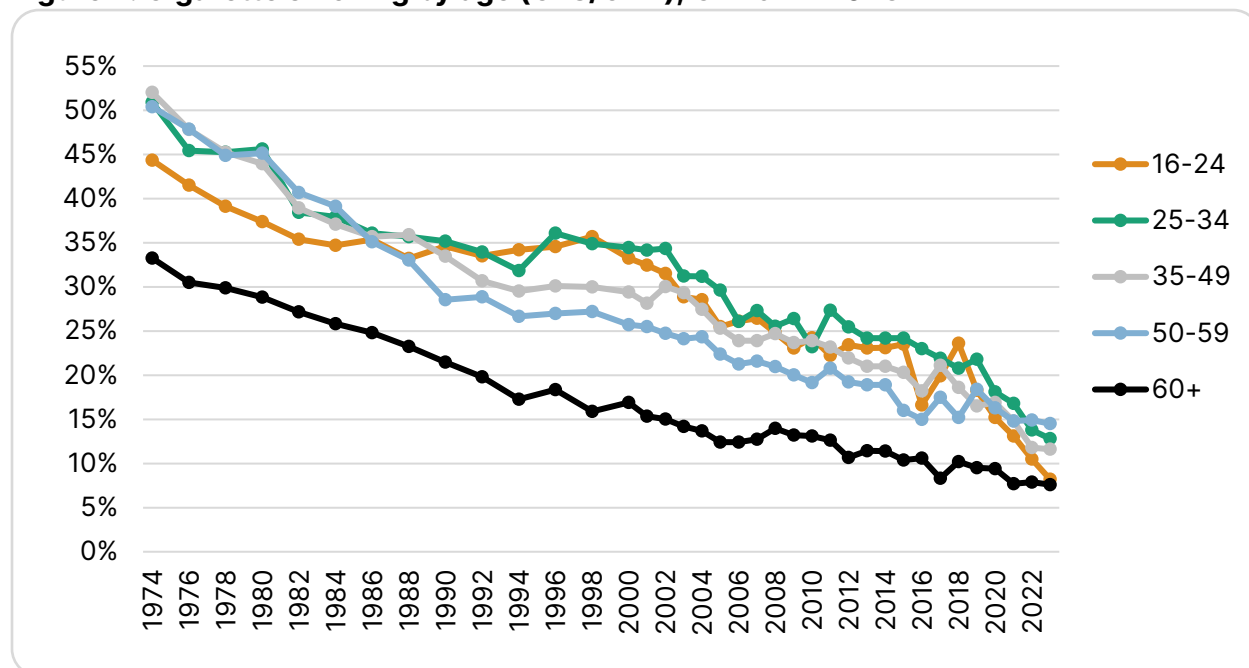
From 2022 to 2023, the rate of smoking in the youngest adults has decreased from 10.5% to 8.2% and is now almost as low as the rate in people aged 60 and over.

Table 6. Cigarette smoking by age (GLS/OPN), GB 1974-2023^{3,4}

%	Age				
	16-24	25-34	35-49	50-59	60+
1974	44.3	50.9	52.0	50.4	33.3
1984	34.7	37.9	37.1	39.1	25.8
1994	34.2	31.8	29.5	26.7	17.3
2004	28.9	31.2	29.3	24.1	14.2
2014	23.1	24.2	21.0	18.9	11.4
2015	23.5	24.2	20.3	16.0	10.4
2016	16.6	23.0	18.2	15.0	10.6

2017	19.9	21.9	21.1	17.5	8.3
2018	23.6	20.8	18.6	15.2	10.2
2019	18.3	21.8	16.5	18.4	9.5
2020	15.2	18.1	16.9	16.3	9.4
2021	13.1	16.8	14.8	14.8	7.7
2022	10.5	13.8	11.8	14.9	7.9
2023	8.2	12.8	11.6	14.5	7.6

Figure 2. Cigarette smoking by age (GLS/OPN), GB 1974-2023^{3,4}



See also ASH fact sheet: [Young people and smoking](#)

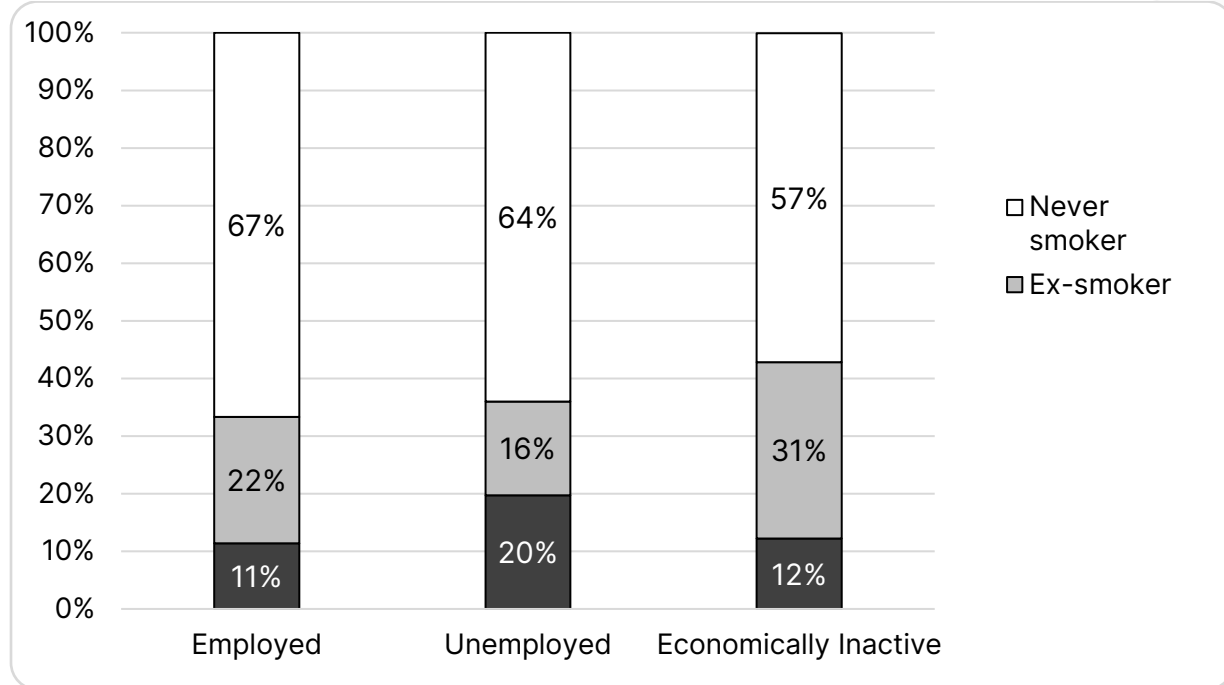
Smoking by socioeconomic group

There is a strong link between cigarette smoking and socio-economic group. In 2023, 20.2% of adults in the UK in routine and manual occupations smoked compared with 7.9% in managerial and professional occupations.²

Historically there has been a slower decline in smoking among manual groups, resulting in smoking becoming increasingly concentrated in this population. However, in recent years, smoking rates have fallen by a similar amount across all social groups, so that the differential between non-manual and manual has not changed significantly.

People in employment are less likely to smoke (11%) than unemployed people (20%).

Figure 3. Prevalence of adult cigarette smoking by employment status (APS) UK age 18+ 2023²



International Labour Organisation (ILO) definitions of economic activity are used. Unemployed people are those who are not currently in work but who are looking for work. The group "economically inactive" contains those who are not in work, and not looking for work. This includes retired people and students.

Tobacco consumption

Since the mid-1970s cigarette consumption has fallen among both men and women, particularly among heavy smokers (defined as those smoking more than 20 cigarettes a day). The average number of cigarettes smoked per day by men and women has seen a general downward trend. In 1974, male smokers living in Great Britain consumed an average of 18.4 cigarettes per day, and female smokers 13.7.³ By 2023, the average number of cigarettes consumed per day had decreased to 11.7 for men and 10.9 for women.⁴

Frequency of smoking and socioeconomic group

Smoking every day is associated with lower socio-economic status. A 2024 survey commissioned by ASH found that daily smoking is more than twice as common in the lowest social group (DE, 12.5%) than in the highest (AB, 5.5%).¹²

Lower cigarette consumption per day is associated with higher socio-economic status. A 2024 survey commissioned by ASH found that 35% of current smokers in highest social group (AB) smoked 6 or fewer cigarettes per day compared to 25% in the lowest social group (DE).¹²

Dependence on cigarette smoking

There are several ways of measuring dependence on smoking including the desire to quit amongst those who nevertheless continue to smoke. Other ways of measuring dependence include how soon the first cigarette of the day is smoked after waking. In 2023, OPN data shows 42% of current smokers in Great Britain had their first cigarette less than 30 minutes after waking.⁴

Desire to stop smoking is high; in 2023 56% of GB current smokers intended to quit and 24% intended to quit in the next three months. Only 16% said that they do not intend to stop.⁴

Illness and disease

Smoking is the primary cause of preventable illness and premature death, accounting for approximately 74,600 deaths a year in England.¹³ Smoking harms nearly every organ of the body and dramatically reduces both quality of life and life expectancy. Smoking causes lung cancer, respiratory disease and heart disease as well as numerous cancers in other organs including the lip, mouth, throat, bladder, kidney, stomach, liver and cervix. The 2010 US Surgeon General report, 'How Tobacco Smoke Causes Disease', concludes that "there is no risk-free level of exposure to tobacco smoke, and there is no safe tobacco product."¹⁴

It is estimated that the global yearly death toll as a result of tobacco use is currently over 8 million (including exposure to second hand smoke).¹⁵ It is predicted that by the end of the 21st century, tobacco will have killed one billion people within the century.¹⁶

For every death caused by smoking, approximately 30 smokers are suffering from a smoking related disease.¹⁷ In England it is estimated that in 2019-20, among adults aged 35 and over, around 506,100 NHS hospital admissions were attributable to smoking, accounting for 4% of all hospital admissions in this age group.¹³ The cost of smoking to the National Health Service in England is estimated to be £1.9 billion a year.¹⁸

Deaths caused by smoking

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the UK. About half of all life-long smokers will die prematurely, losing on average about 10 years of life.¹⁹ Data from the Global Burden Study of Disease, 2021 reports the proportion of deaths in the United Kingdom.²⁰ Smoking is the cause of 10.7% of deaths in the UK each year. It kills more people each year than the following preventable causes of death combined:²⁰

- High body mass index – 5.8%
- Alcohol use – 2.9%
- Drug use – 1.0%

Most smoking-related deaths arise from one of three types of disease: lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD which incorporates emphysema and chronic bronchitis) and coronary heart disease (CHD).

In 2019, 15% (74,600) of all deaths of adults aged 35 and over in England were estimated to be attributable to smoking.¹³ It is estimated that smoking causes:

- 35,500 (25%) of all cancer deaths (52% of cancers that can be caused by smoking)
- 23,700 (35%) of all respiratory deaths
- 14,700 (12%) of all circulatory disease deaths

Table 7: Estimated percentages and numbers of deaths attributable to smoking in England by cause among adults aged 35 and over, 2019¹³

	Observed deaths	Male deaths	Male % attributable to smoking	Female deaths	Female % attributable to smoking	Total
Cancers which can be caused by smoking	68,279	22,800	59	12,800	43	35,500
Trachea, Lung, Bronchus	27,490	12,700	85	8,700	69	21,400
Upper Respiratory Sites	2,548	1,200	69	400	44	1,600
Larynx	631	400	79	100	71	500
Oesophagus	6,668	3,000	67	1,200	55	4,200
Cervical	636	0	0	100	9	100
Bladder	4,641	1,300	41	400	27	1,700
Kidney and Renal Pelvis	3,966	800	31	100	7	900
Stomach	3,299	500	23	100	11	600
Pancreas	8,082	800	19	900	22	1,700
Unspecified site	7,871	1,800	50	700	18	2,600
Myeloid Leukaemia	2,447	300	20	100	9	400
Respiratory diseases which can be caused by smoking	50,173	12,800	52	10,900	43	23,700
Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease	1,150	700	88	300	81	1,000
Chronic Airway Obstruction	24,839	9,700	77	9,100	74	18,800
Pneumonia, Influenza	24,184	2,500	22	1,500	11	3,900
Circulatory diseases which can be caused by smoking	111,276	9,700	16	5,000	10	14,700
Other Heart Disease	25,538	1,800	16	1,200	8	3,000
Ischaemic Heart Disease	51,049	4,700	15	1,900	10	6,700
Other Arterial Disease	2,477	200	13	200	14	300
Cerebrovascular Disease	27,716	1,400	12	800	5	2,200

Aortic Aneurysm	4,433	1,600	59	900	49	2,400
Atherosclerosis	63	0	24	0	8	0
Diseases of the digestive system which can be caused by smoking	1,549	400	47	300	38	700
Stomach / Duodenal Ulcer	1,549	400	47	300	38	700

NB: The estimated attributable number of deaths is rounded to the nearest 100. Numbers may not all total due to rounding.

See also:

ASH fact sheet: [Secondhand smoke](#)

ASH fact sheet: [Smoking and cancer](#)

ASH fact sheet: [Smoking and respiratory disease](#)

ASH fact sheet: [Smoking, the heart and circulation](#)

Non-fatal diseases

There are many medical conditions associated with or aggravated by smoking, which may not be fatal but still cause years of debilitating illness. These include:

Heart and circulation	Angina, Buerger's Disease (severe circulatory disease), Peripheral vascular disease
Respiratory	Asthma, Common cold, Chronic rhinitis (inflammation of nose), Influenza, Tuberculosis
Stomach/digestive system	Colon polyps, Crohn's disease (chronic inflamed bowel), Duodenal ulcer, Stomach ulcer
Mouth	Gingivitis & Periodontitis (gum disease), Tooth loss, Tooth discolouration
Ligaments, muscles and bones	Ligament, tendon and muscle injuries, Neck and back pain, Osteoporosis (in both sexes), Rheumatoid arthritis
Eyes	Cataract, Macular degeneration, Nystagmus (abnormal eye movements), Optic neuropathy (loss of vision), Ocular histoplasmosis (fungal eye infection), Tobacco Amblyopia (loss of vision), Diabetic retinopathy, Optic neuritis
Skin	Psoriasis, skin wrinkling
Reproductive functions	Female fertility (30% lower), Menopause (onset 1.74 years earlier on average), Male fertility (Impotence, Reduced sperm count and motility, sperm less able to penetrate the ovum, increased shape abnormalities)
Other	Depression, Hearing loss, Multiple sclerosis, Type 2 Diabetes

Resources

For information about tobacco use and related harm at local level in England, please refer to [Public Health England's Local Tobacco Control Profiles for England](#). For more statistics on deaths from smoking in the UK and worldwide see [Deaths from Smoking](#).

Smoking data	Data Source	Source link
Smoking Prevalence	Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics	Smoking habits in the UK and its constituent countries
Cigarette smoking by gender and age	Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)	Adult smoking habits in Great Britain (Table 1)
Risk factors responsible for deaths	Global Burden Study of Disease, 2021, United Kingdom	GBD Compare 2021 United Kingdom
Deaths attributable to smoking	Office for National Statistics (ONS) annual extract of registered deaths and is based on original cause of death.	Statistics on Public Health England 2021, Part 2 – Smoking related mortality
Smoking-related hospital admissions.	NHS Digital's Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) and is based on the primary diagnosis.	Part 1: Smoking-related ill health and mortality

When referring to this publication, please cite as:

Action on Smoking and Health (ASH). Smoking Statistics, 2024

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- ³ [General Lifestyle Survey](#) - Office for National Statistics (GLS), 1974 – 2011. Results available [here](#)
- ⁴ [Adult smoking habits in the UK: 2023](#). Office for National Statistics. Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN). Results available [here](#)
- ⁵ [PSA Delivery Agreement 18: Promote better health and well-being for all](#) - The Treasury, Oct 2007
- ⁶ [A Smokefree Future. A comprehensive tobacco control strategy for England](#) - Department of Health, February 2010
- ⁷ [Stopping the start: Our new plan to create a smokefree generation](#) – Department of Health and Social Care, November 2023
- ⁸ [Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s](#) – HM Government, July 2019
- ⁹ [Towards a smoke-free generation: tobacco control plan for England](#) - Department of Health, July 2017
- ¹⁰ [Healthy Lives, Healthy People: A Tobacco Control Plan for England](#).- HM Government, March 2011

¹¹ [Smoking Kills A White Paper on Tobacco](#) – The Stationary Office, 1998

¹² ASH Smokefree GB Survey 2024. Total sample size was 13,266. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults in Great Britain (aged 18+) Fieldwork was undertaken by YouGov online between 29th February and 18th March 2024

¹³ [Statistics on Smoking, England 2020](#) Smoking-related ill health and mortality, NHS Digital (Table 1.4 & 1.5)

¹⁴ [How Tobacco Smoke Causes Disease: The Biology and Behavioural Basis for Smoking Attributable Disease: A Report of the Surgeon General](#). Department of Health and Human Services, 2010

¹⁵ [Factsheet 339, Tobacco](#) World Health Organisation, May 2022

¹⁶ Jha, P., & Peto, R. (2014). [Global effects of smoking, of quitting, and of taxing tobacco](#). *New England Journal of Medicine*, 370(1), 60–68.

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¹⁹ Doll R, Peto, R, Boreham & Sutherland I. [Mortality in relation to smoking: 50 years' observations on male British doctors](#). *BMJ* 2004; 328: 1519

²⁰ Global Burden Study of Disease, 2019, United Kingdom