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For papers that will be published online on 19 August 2009

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**[Stress may increase teen risk for smoking](#)**

DOI: 10.1038/npp.2009.112

Neurobiological factors and stressful life events can trigger and prolong smoking habits in adolescents, especially in individuals with depression. The preliminary findings, reported online in this week's *Neuropsychopharmacology*, may lead to better interventions for depression and smoking in adolescents.

Most smoking habits in adults are initiated during adolescence, though the triggers that lead to such early habits are unknown. Previous studies had shown that external stress and

neurobiological factors, individually, are linked to smoking. Furthermore, it has been documented that there is a link between depression and increased risk for smoking.

In this integrated study, Uma Rao and colleagues looked at the role of neurobiological factors and external stress, such as family and peer relationships, on smoking behavior in adolescents. The scientists followed 151 adolescents for up to five years to monitor their life events, brain stress levels, depressive episodes, and smoking habits. Brain stress levels were measured by recording individuals' cortisol levels – a stress hormone that is normally released as a coping mechanism in response to stressful situations.

Rao and colleagues found that adolescents who had high cortisol levels were more likely to begin smoking, and that stressful experiences further increased this risk. The high cortisol levels and stressful experiences in adolescents accounted for some of this association between depression and smoking, but the authors caution that these findings need to be verified with a larger study.

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