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Smoking statistics: who smokes and how much

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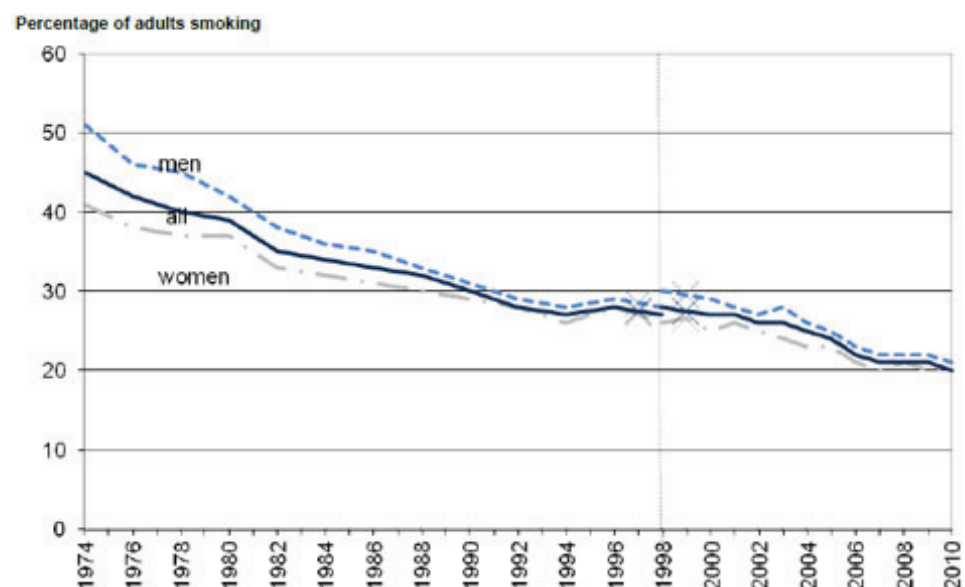
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Number of adult smokers

The highest recorded level of smoking among men in Great Britain was 82% in 1948, of which 65% smoked 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 fairly constant until the early 1970's, peaking at 45% in the mid 1960's.¹

Overall prevalence among adults (aged 16 and over) fell steadily between the mid 1970s and early 1980s. After 1982, the rate of decline slowed, with prevalence falling to about one percentage point every two years until the early 1990's when it levelled out. Since 2000 overall adult smoking rates had been declining by around 0.4% per annum.² Between 2007 and 2009, overall smoking prevalence among adults in Great Britain remained the same at 21%, dropping to 20% in 2010 (21% of men and 20% of women).

Prevalence of cigarette smoking by sex in Great Britain, 1974 to 2010



1 For 1998 unweighted and weighted data are shown for comparison purposes. Weighted data are not available before this point.
2 The survey was not run in 1997/98 or 1999/00. A linear trend has been drawn between the data point before and after these years.

Source: General Lifestyle Survey, Office for National Statistics

There are about 10 million adult cigarette smokers in Great Britain and about the same number of ex-smokers. 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 2010 this had risen to 39% and 23% respectively.

Measuring smoking rates

Periodically the Government sets targets to reduce smoking prevalence in the population. 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.³ The latest GLS survey shows that the target for the general population has been achieved but not that for lower socio-economic groups (28% in 2010).

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 2020.⁴ 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 young people to 12% or less by 2015.⁵

Cigarette smoking and age

Smoking prevalence is highest in the 20-24 age group among women (29%) and in the 25-34 age group among men (28%) but thereafter in older age groups the proportion of smokers declines.

Smoking continues to be lowest among people aged 60 and over. Although they are more likely than younger people to have ever been smokers, they are more likely to have stopped smoking.

Cigarette smoking by age – percentage of adult population

%	Age					
	16-19	20-24	25-34	35-49	50-59	60+
1978	34	44	45	45	45	30
1988	26	37	36	36	33	23
1998	31	40	35	31	28	16
2008	22	30	27	24	22	13
2009	24	26	25	25	21	14
2010	19	27	26	24	20	13

Number of secondary school children who smoke

Very few pupils are smokers when they start secondary school: among 11 year olds only 1% are regular smokers. The likelihood of smoking increases with age so that by 15 years of age 12% of pupils are regular smokers.

Overall, the prevalence of regular smoking among children aged 11-15 remained stable at between 9 and 11 per cent from 1998 until 2006. However, in 2007 there was a fall in overall prevalence from 9% to 6%, the lowest rate recorded since surveys of pupils' smoking began in 1982. There was a further decline in 2010 to 5% overall and to 12% among 15 year olds.⁶ For further information see [ASH Fact Sheet on Young People and smoking](#) (pdf).

Percentage of pupils aged 15 who are regular smokers (at least one cigarette per week on average) England

	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2009	2010
Boys	24	18	25	26	19	20	16	14	10
Girls	25	27	25	30	29	26	24	16	14
All	25	22	25	28	23	23	20	15	12

Cigarette smoking and socio-economic group

There is a strong link between cigarette smoking and socio-economic group. In 2010, 29% of men and 28% of women in routine and manual occupations smoked compared to 14% of men and 12% of women in managerial and professional occupations.

Prevalence of cigarette smoking by socio-economic classification based on current or last job of the household reference person

Persons aged 16 and over. Great Britain: 2010 (%)

	Men	Women	Total
Large employers and higher managerial	11	9	10
Higher professional	10	9	9
Lower managerial and professional	17	14	15
Intermediate	19	22	20
Small employers / own account	22	18	20
Lower supervisory and technical	26	22	24
Semi-routine	28	29	29
Routine	32	30	31

Historically there has been a slower decline in smoking among manual groups, resulting in smoking becoming increasingly concentrated in this population. 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.

As in previous Government Health Surveys, the 2010 data revealed an association between socio-economic group and the age at which people started to smoke. Of those in the managerial and professional households, 32% had started smoking before they were 16, compared with 45% of those in routine and manual households. For more information, see [ASH Fact Sheet: Young People and Smoking](#) (pdf).

Tobacco consumption

Consumption of manufactured cigarettes among adult male smokers rose from 14 per day in 1948 to 19 per day in 1955, and remained at about this level until 1970 when there was an increase to 22 per day by 1973. Among female smokers, consumption rose steadily from 7 cigarettes per day in 1949 to a maximum of 17 per day in 1976.

Since the mid 1970s cigarette consumption has fallen among both men and women. The overall reported number of cigarettes smoked per male and female smoker has changed little since the mid 1980s, averaging 13 cigarettes per smoker per day. As in previous years, men smoked slightly more per day on average than women and there was an association between consumption and socio-economic group. In 2010, smokers in manual occupations smoked an average of 14 cigarettes a day compared with 11 a day for those in managerial or professional groups.

Daily consumption of manufactured cigarettes per smoker, 1949-2010^{1, 3}

Year	1949	1959	1969	1979	1990	2000	2002	2006	2008	2010
Men	14.1	18.4	18.9	21.6	16.8	15	15	15	14	14
Women	6.8	11.0	13.7	16.6	13.9	13	13	13	13	12

Dependence on cigarette smoking

In 2010, 64% of smokers said they would like to stop smoking altogether. Other ways of measuring dependence include how difficult people would find it to go for a whole day without smoking and how soon they smoke after waking.

First cigarette of the day

In 2010, 14% of all smokers had their first cigarette within 5 minutes of waking. Among smokers of 20 or more cigarettes a day, 32% smoked their first cigarette of the day within 5 minutes of waking, compared to just 4% of those smoking fewer than 10 a day.

Managing without a cigarette for the whole day

In 2010, 58% of smokers said they would find it hard to go for a whole day without smoking. Eighty-two per cent of heavier smokers (20 or more a day) said they would find it difficult, compared to 27% of those smoking fewer than 10 cigarettes per day.

Proportion of smokers who would find it difficult to go without smoking for a day by sex and number of cigarettes smoked per day Great Britain 2010

No of cigarettes	Men %	Women %	All smokers %
20 or more	80	85	82
10-19	63	70	67
0-9	25	28	27
All smokers	56	60	58

References

Unless otherwise stated, information is taken from: The [2010 General Lifestyle Survey](#). Office for National Statistics, March 2012.

- 1 Wald, N. and Nicolaides-Bouman, A. UK Smoking Statistics. 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, 1991
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- 3 [PSA Delivery Agreement 18: Promote better health and well-being for all](#). The Treasury, Oct 2007 (pdf)
- 4 A Smokefree Future. A comprehensive tobacco control strategy for England. Department of Health, 2010.
- 5 [Healthy Lives, Healthy People: A Tobacco Control Plan for England](#). HM Government, March 2011
- 6 [Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2010](#). Information Centre for Health and Social Care, 2011.