

Multiple Sclerosis

MA Hernan et al. *American Journal of Epidemiology*. July (2001) Vol. 154 #1 p 69.

A prospective study of the proposed association between cigarette smoking and development of multiple sclerosis.

Interest in finding fault-based causes of MS has increased; it may now be accepted that extreme physical injury may be a cause MS. If so, other causes would be influential in assessing contribution.

Prospective study of 121700 women aged 30 – 55 in 1976 cohort and a separate study of 116,671 women aged 25 – 42 in 1989.

Biennial Qr. for smoking status. The group of “never smokers” were taken as the control population.

315 definite or probable cases of MS were found during the follow up period.

Relative incidence rate = 1.6 (95% CI = 1.2 to 2.1) for current smokers and 1.2 (95% CI = 0.9 to 1.6) for former smokers after adjusting for age etc.

Dose response effect observed but not statistically robust.

Comment

A weak association with current smokers. A possible contributory cause. As yet there does not appear to be a biological explanation for this.

Some would argue that the probability of smoking could be increased among the unwell (a form of coping). However, there is evidence that undiagnosed and recently diagnosed cases find smoking increases symptoms and therefore reduced smoking is more likely to be the case.

