Text Messages May Help Smokers Kick the Addiction, Small Study Finds

Brain MRIs also provide data for smoking cessation 'texts' tailored to individual's capacity for self-control

Posted: March 11, 2011

FRIDAY, March 11 (HealthDay News) -- Text messages may help smokers kick the addiction, particularly if they are tailored to the individual, according to researchers who conducted two studies on 27 heavy smokers.

In one study, functional MRI was used to pinpoint the brain regions most active in controlling urges to smoke, which researchers described as "a war that consists of a series of momentary self-control skirmishes." The study found that participants who had the most activity in the key regions of their brains during testing were also the most likely to resist their desire to smoke -- something that was documented in their responses to later text messages.

Since the MRI scans predicted a person's ability to control their responses to cravings, the researchers speculated that it may be possible to customize smoking cessation programs to a person's own capacity for self-control.

"We are really excited about this result because it means that the brain activation we see in the scanner is predictive of real-world outcomes across a much longer time span than we thought," Elliot Berkman, a professor of psychology at the University of Oregon, said in a university news release.

The study appears online this March in the journal Psychological Science.

In the second study, Berkman and colleagues tested whether short text messages could be used to track smokers' attempts to control their smoking urges. The participants were sent eight text messages per day for three weeks reminding them to document their ongoing smoking cravings, cigarette use and mood.

The researchers concluded that text messaging is at least as effective as more costly and hard-to-use handheld devices used to collect such data.

"Text messaging may be an ideal delivery mechanism for tailored interventions because it is low-cost, most people already possess the existing hardware and the messages can be delivered..."
near-instantaneously into real-world situations," the researchers wrote.

That study appears this week in the journal *Health Psychology*.

**More information**

The American Cancer Society offers a [guide to quitting smoking](http://health.usnews.com/health-news/family-health/brain-and-...).