MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Smoking in patients with multiple sclerosis —is it ever too late to quit?

Smokers who are diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) might be able to improve their prognosis by giving up cigarettes, according to new data from Sweden, reported in *JAMA Neurology*. “We already knew that smoking—and passive smoking—increases the risk of MS, but we had no idea whether it played any negative role once the disease had started,” explains study leader Jan Hillert.

The cross-sectional study included 728 individuals with MS selected from the Swedish National MS Registry, all of whom were smokers at the time of diagnosis. The number of years during which the participants continued to smoke after MS diagnosis was compared with the risk of conversion from a relapsing–remitting to a secondary progressive disease course.

The researchers discovered that individuals who continued to smoke after receiving a diagnosis of MS developed secondary progressive MS (SPMS)

a median of 8 years earlier than those who gave up smoking around this time. For each year of smoking continuation after MS diagnosis, the time to conversion to SPMS was reduced by 4.7%.

Interestingly, the authors found no correlation between smoking history prior to MS diagnosis and risk of conversion to SPMS thereafter, suggesting that smoking

cessation can be beneficial even when the disease process is well underway. The investigators conclude that patients with MS should be advised to give up smoking, not only to improve their overall health status and avoid comorbidities, but also to mitigate progression of the disease itself.

In view of the expense of disease-modifying drugs for MS, it would be pertinent to explore whether lifestyle interventions such as giving up smoking could reduce the reliance on these drugs to keep the condition under control. “We need to find out whether treatment with MS disease-modifying drugs overrides the negative effects of smoking, and whether smoking annihilates the positive effects of such drugs,” says Hillert.

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Original article Ramanujam, R. et al. Effect of smoking cessation on multiple sclerosis prognosis. *JAMA Neurol.* doi:10.1001/jamaneurol.2015.1788