

Fastfacts

Cigarette filters do not provide health benefits

No. 27 – February 2018

What are cigarette filters?

- cigarette filters generally consist of a rod of bioplastic cellulose acetate fibres
 - tobacco companies introduced filter-tipped cigarettes in the 1950s following the emergence of research linking smoking to lung cancer
 - filter design has changed to include ventilation holes, justified as reducing tar intake by smokers by effectively diluting the smoke taken in
 - tests show that smokers respond to ventilation through “compensation”, puffing harder or longer to draw more smoke (and thereby nicotine) or covering up ventilation holes
 - instead, the primary result of ventilation is to obscure the true emissions of a cigarette from standard smoking machine-based tests
 - ventilation is the subject of a lawsuit in the Netherlands, accusing the tobacco industry of effectively “tampering” with cigarettes to game emissions tests.
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Do cigarette filters affect health?

- in the mid 1960’s the US Surgeon General judged filters to be useless in reducing harm to smokers, and research conducted since continues to support this conclusion.
 - a 2011 study concluded that the ‘shift from nonfilter to filter cigarettes appears to have merely altered the most frequent type of lung cancer’
 - the ineffectiveness of cigarette filters and the tobacco industry’s misleading marketing of the benefits of filtered cigarettes are well documented
 - filter-tipped cigarettes may emit more harmful particles into the air as second-hand smoke than non-filter equivalents
 - defective filters, releasing plastic fibres and carbon particles, were knowingly sold by Philip Morris for 40 years without public disclosure.
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Do filters change perceptions about health?

- in a 2015 study, more than two thirds of smokers thought that filtered cigarettes were less harmful than unfiltered ones.
- ventilated filters change the taste of cigarettes, helping “lights” to taste light without reducing the intake of harmful chemicals by smokers
- tobacco companies have recognised that this lighter-tasting smoke suggests to smokers that the cigarette is less harmful.

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