Second-hand tobacco smoke in perspective

Life is full of risks. But they're not all equal.

Almost every day, it seems that one thing or another has been discovered to be some kind of health risk. In one scientific study, even the ordinary biscuit was linked to heart disease. But as common sense suggests (and scientists confirm) not everything described statistically as a risk is a meaningful risk. For example, lots of people have been persuaded that second-hand tobacco smoke is harmful.

Not surprising, perhaps. After all, we recognise that smoking itself is a risk factor for certain human diseases and that some people find second-hand tobacco smoke unappealing and unpleasant.

But what about second-hand tobacco smoke? Is it a really meaningful health risk to people who've chosen not to smoke? Not, we think, if you look at the evidence. The United States Environmental Protection Agency recently conducted a major review of studies on the risks of second-hand tobacco smoke to non-smokers. These studies typically involve non-smokers living with smokers over a long period, such as 20 years.

And this review put the risk on lung cancer from second-hand tobacco smoke at a level well below the risk reported by other studies for many everyday items and activities. And below, in fact, the risk to health that one other study reported for eating one biscuit a day.

As the table below shows, many everyday activities have been statistically associated at one time or another with apparent risks to health. But reputable scientists say that weak associations aren't necessarily meaningful. So there's no big campaign to persuade you to give up your daily biscuit. Nor there is any sound justification for a campaign against second-hand tobacco smoke.

If you'd like to decide for yourself, please write to us at Philip Morris Europe S.A., c/o P.O. Box 107, 1000 AC Amsterdam, The Netherlands or fax us at 0031 20 671 98 89

We'll send you the evidence about second-hand smoke. We believe you'll find the case convincing.

	Everyday activities	Reported Relative Risk*	Reported Health Effect	Scientific Study Reference
Associated with additional risk	Diet highest in saturated fat	6.14	Lung cancer	Journal of the National Cancer Institute, Vol.85, p.1906 (1993)
	Non-vegetarian diet	3.08	Heart disease	American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Vol.31, p.S191 (1978)
	Frequently cooking with rapeseed oil	2.80	Lung cancer	International Journal of Cancer, Vol.40, p.604 (1987)
	Drinking 1-2 glasses of whole milk per day	1.62	Lung cancer	International Journal of Cancer, Vol.43, p.608 (1989)
Weak association with risk	Eating one biscuit a day	1.49	Heart disease	Lancet, Vol.341, p.581 (1993)
	Drinking chlorinated water	1.38	Rectal cancer	American Journal of Public Health, Vol. 82, p.995 (1992)
	Eating pepper frequently	1.30	Mortality	American Journal of Epidemiology, Vol. 119, p.775 (1984)
	Exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke	1.19	Lung cancer	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (1992)
Associated with reduced risk	High vegetable diet	0.37	Lung cancer	International Journal of Epidemiology, Vol.25, Suppl.1, p.32 (1996)
	High fruit diet	0.31	Lung cancer	American Journal of Epidemiology, Vol. 113, p.683 (1991)

* Relative risk measures how much consuming, or being exposed to something, raises or lowers risk

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Second-hand tobacco smoke. Let's keep a sense of perspective.