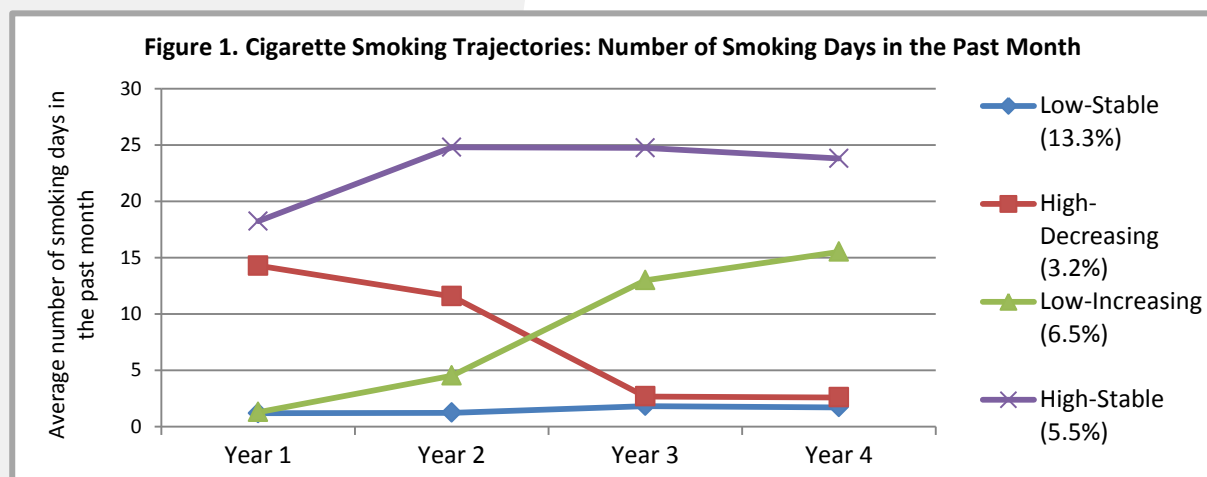


Cigarette smoking and health outcomes among college students

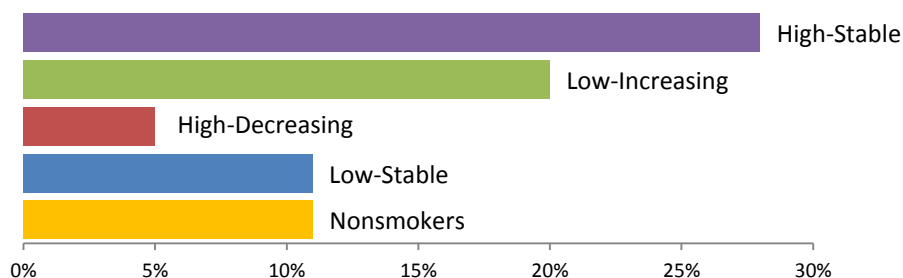
MAJOR FINDINGS:

A four-year study of 1,253 college students investigated what effects smoking during college would have on health outcomes in young adulthood. First, researchers grouped individuals by their smoking pattern over the four years. Most study participants (72%) did not smoke, and the remaining participants were classified into different groups based on their four-year smoking pattern: “low-stable”, “high-stable”, “low-increasing”, and “high-decreasing” (see Figure 1). The majority of the smokers were in the “low-stable” category, making up 13% of the total sample, and the least common of all were the “high-decreasing” smokers (3%). Most first-year infrequent smokers were able to maintain that low level throughout four years. However, a higher smoking frequency during the first year (as measured by the number of smoking days within the past month) increased chances of becoming a frequent smoker by the fourth year.



Most importantly, results showed significant differences in health outcomes during the fourth year between students with different smoking patterns. Namely, students with more frequent smoking histories fared worse with respect to self-reported health status, number of days ill, and number of provider visits for physical health problems. For example, by the fourth year, high-stable smokers and low-increasers were significantly more likely to rate their health status as “fair” or “poor” (as opposed to “excellent” or good”) compared to the other groups (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Likelihood of Self-reported Fair/Poor Health Status by Smoking Trajectory



Of major interest to:

- College Administrators
- Parents
- Educators
- Health Professionals
- Students
- Law and Policy Makers



Practice and Policy Suggestions: Although tobacco use has been declining among youth for the last decade, smoking continues to be a costly public health burden. Health care providers who treat college-age patients should discuss the negative impacts of smoking, even if the patient reports using infrequently, or claims only to “smoke socially.”

College administrators should make smoking cessation resources visible and accessible for college students, including interventions such as web-based programs and contingency management. Some students might see the transition to college as an opportunity for a “fresh start,” so one promising strategy might be to design smoking-cessation interventions that take advantage of this mentality by targeting incoming first-year students.

The complete publication referenced in this research brief can be found here: Caldeira, K.M., O’Grady, K.E., Garnier-Dykstra, L.M., Vincent, K.B., Pickworth, W.B., Arria, A.M. (2012). Cigarette smoking among college students: Longitudinal trajectories and health outcomes. *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*. 14(7), 777-785. doi:10.1093/ntr/nts131



About the College Life Study (CLS)

The CLS is a longitudinal study of 1,253 college students at a large, public, mid-Atlantic university. This study is one of the first large-scale scientific investigations that aims to discover the impact of health-related behaviors during the college experience. Any first time, first-year student between 17 and 19 years old at the university in the fall of 2004 was eligible to participate in a screening survey. The researchers then selected students to participate in the longitudinal study, which consisted of two-hour personal interviews administered annually, beginning with their first year of college. A full description of the methods used is available.^{1,2} Inherent to all self-reporting research methods is the possibility for response bias. Because the sample is from one large university, the ability to generalize the findings elsewhere is uncertain. However, response rates have been excellent and attrition bias has been minimal.

For more information about the study, please visit www.cls.umd.edu or contact Amelia M. Arria at the University of Maryland School of Public Health at aarria@umd.edu.

¹ Arria, A.M., Caldeira, K.M., O’Grady, K.E., Vincent, K.B., Fitzelle, D.B., Johnson, E.P., Wish, E.D. (2008). Drug exposure opportunities and use patterns among college students: Results of a longitudinal prospective cohort study. *Substance Abuse*. 29(4), 19-38.

² Vincent, K.B., Kasperski, S.J., Caldeira, K.M., Garnier-Dykstra, L.M., Pinchevsky, G.M., O’Grady, K.E., Arria, A.M. (2012). Maintaining superior follow-up rates in a longitudinal study: Experiences from the College Life Study. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*. 6(1), 56-72.

This research brief was prepared by Olga Moshkovich and disseminated by the Treatment Research Institute (TRI), a non-profit research and development group specializing in science-driven transformation of treatment and policy in substance use/abuse. Click [here](#) to learn more about TRI.

