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WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR  
**HEALTH X AGEING**

**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**Wednesday, February 10, 2011**

### **SMOKING CAUSES BRAIN CELL LOSS AND COGNITIVE DECLINE**

Older smokers damage their grey matter and lose cognitive function at a greater rate than non smokers according to a new study by researchers at The University of Western Australia.

The study led by Professor Osvaldo Almeida, Research Director of UWA affiliate the Western Australian Centre for Health and Ageing, found that chronic older smokers experienced a marked reduction of grey matter in certain brain regions, which equates to losing brain cells.

“One finding that is really important from a health point of view is that chronic smokers who quit during the study lost less brain cells and retained better intellectual function than those who continued to smoke. Over a two year period smokers who had discontinued smoking showed similar rates of memory decline to people who never smoked,” Professor Almeida said.

Cognitive functions involve thought, memory and information processes enabling us to learn new things and comprehend what is being said.

“Older people who smoke should ask themselves if they are concerned about losing their memory. If the answer is ‘yes’, then our results give them a very good reason to quit,” Professor Almeida said.

The study involved 332 community-living people who were 68 years old or over. Chronic smokers were classified as consuming more than 5 cigarettes a day for the last 12 months. The smokers completed a diary and all volunteers were given medical and cognitive function assessments at 6, 12 and 24 months after commencement.

Another breakthrough of the study was the development of a new technique that allows researchers to better assess brain changes over time.

Professor Almeida believes future studies should attempt to determine if similar changes occur in younger age groups.

The project was funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia and has been published in [NeuroImage](#), A Journal of Brain Function.

### **MEDIA REFERENCE**

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