

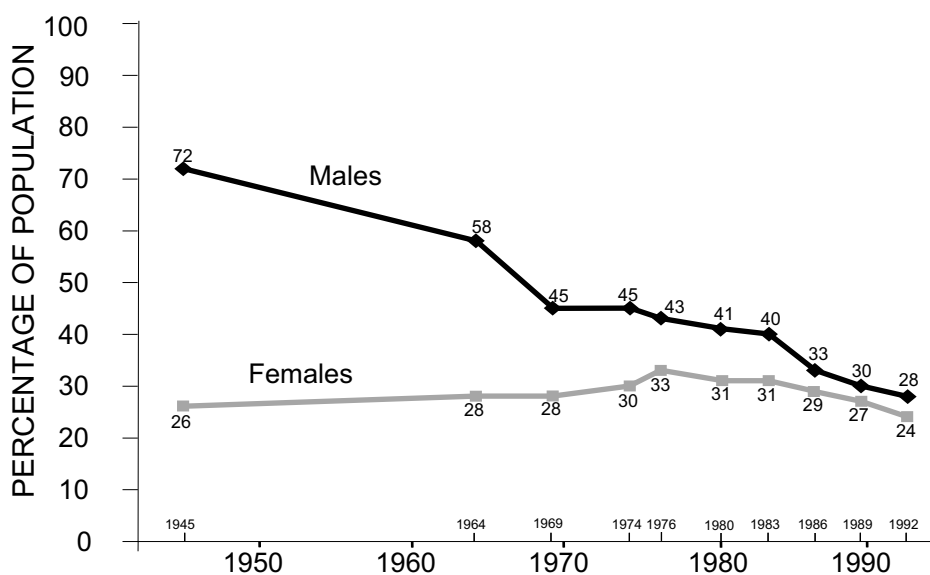
WHO? SMOKES!

Sometimes it might seem like 'everybody' smokes, but in fact most Australians are non-smokers. The latest surveys show that less than one-third of adults smoke. This TAP unit looks at smoking patterns over the years, and smoking behaviour in adults and schoolchildren.

If you look at the percentage of people who have smoked over the years, it is clear that smoking is getting less popular (Figure 1). In 1945, three-quarters of men smoked,¹ but now less than 30% of men do. Women have always smoked at lower rates than men, and now their rates are also going down.

People are quitting smoking, but just as importantly, more and more are choosing not to start in the first place.^{2,3} It is estimated that around 150,000 Australians quit smoking permanently each year.⁴

Figure 1: Percentage of smokers among adult Australians



Sources: Woodward,¹ Hill.^{2,3,5}

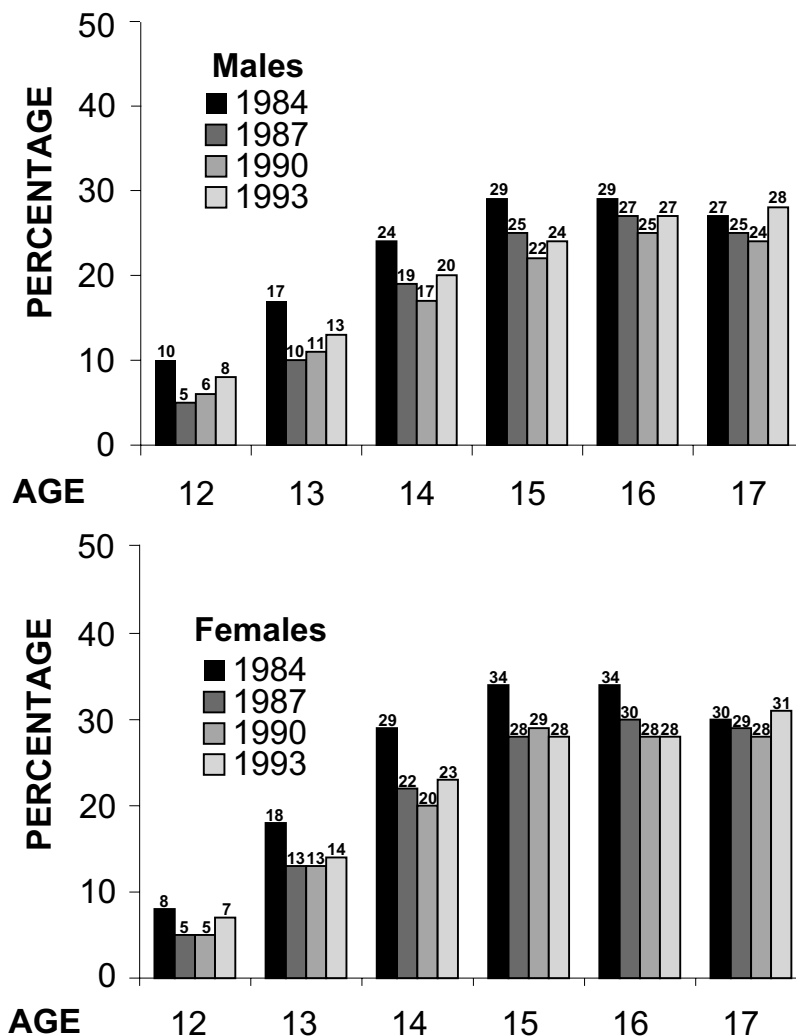
Young people and smoking

Smoking patterns of young people are similar to those of adults, with most teenagers choosing not to smoke (Figure 2). In most age groups, smoking is more popular among girls than boys,⁶ although male rates overtake female rates once people reach their 20s.^{2,3,5}

Young people who smoke, tend to start when they are between the ages of 12 and 16. Almost one third of 15 to 16 year olds smoke cigarettes regularly. Most of those who try smoking out, decide not to become regular smokers.⁶

In the late 1980s young people's smoking rates decreased across all age groups.⁷ In the early 1990s however there has been an increase in young people smoking in Australia, as well as the USA, Canada and the United Kingdom.⁸ In Australia, the increase was strongest among 12 to 15 year olds, and due mainly to an increase in experimental smoking by boys.⁹

Figure 2: Percentage of Australian school children who smoked in the last week - 1984, 1987, 1990 and 1993.



Sources: Hill, et al.^{6,7,8,10}

The older a person is before trying cigarettes the less likely they are to take it up. Most smokers begin while they are in their teens, although some might take it up when they start working, or go on to further education. You can read more about this in TAP 6.

Who Smokes? - activities

1. Look at Figure 1. If male and female smoking rates continue to decrease at the same rate, in what year would there be no smokers in Australia? Do you think this would be likely to happen?

Are the influences the same for boys and girls?

What is the greatest influence for each age group?

What sort of things do you think would influence:

- adult males to smoke/not smoke?

- adult females to smoke/not smoke?

Consider: brothers, sisters, friends, mum, dad, advertisements, teachers, cousins, musicians, movie stars, sports people, artists, and so on.

2. According to Figure 2, (in 1993) 24% of boys aged 15, and 28% of girls aged 15 had smoked in the past week. Find out what sorts of influences there might be on boys and girls to smoke or not smoke.

3. Look at Figure 2 again. At the age of 15 (in 1993), 28% of girls and 24% of boys smoked. That means that 72% of girls and 76% of boys didn't smoke. Does it surprise you that more students didn't smoke than did? Why/why not?

4. Talk to an adult who smokes and ask them why they started to smoke and how old they were when they started to smoke. How do they feel about their decision now? Would they like to change their mind? Why/why not?

5. Although most people who try it decide not to continue smoking, most smokers started in their 'teens'. Write an article for your local newspaper, challenging the idea that smoking is an 'adult' choice.

6. Write an essay about the experiences of a child from another planet who comes to live on earth. What would she/he think of the things you and your friends do? What do you imagine she/he would do?

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