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The Effect of Smoking on Obesity: Evidence from a Randomized Trial*

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Abstract

This paper aims to identify the causal effect of smoking on body mass index (BMI) using data from the Lung Health Study, a randomized trial of smoking cessation treatments. Since nicotine is a metabolic stimulant and appetite suppressant, quitting or reducing smoking could lead to weight gain. Using randomized treatment assignment to instrument for smoking, we estimate that quitting smoking leads to an average long-run weight gain of 1.8-1.9 BMI units, or 11-12 pounds at the average height. Semi-parametric models provide evidence of a diminishing marginal effect of smoking on BMI, while subsample regressions show that the impact is largest for younger individuals, those with no college degree, and those in the lowest quartile of baseline BMI.

Keywords: smoking, obesity
JEL codes: I10, I12, C11

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