

Re-evaluating the Relation between Smoking and BMI: The Impact of Time Preference

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Abstract

Prior studies have found a strong negative relation between smoking and body mass index (BMI). Other studies identify an equally consistent relation between smoking and the consumption of lower-quality diets. This study posits that smoking and unhealthy eating both involve a preference for present versus future consumption. By proxying this preference through a composite index of equally-weighted intertemporal behaviors, we are able to isolate the impact of smoking upon BMI independent of time discounting. The addition of the time preference proxy to a multivariate model inflates the magnitude of smoking effect, consistent with discounted utility theory. Results suggest that prior estimates of the impact of smoking on body mass may have underestimated the effect since they fail to take the intertemporal preferences of smokers into account.

Endnotes

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