

# Less than 30% smokers have health cover

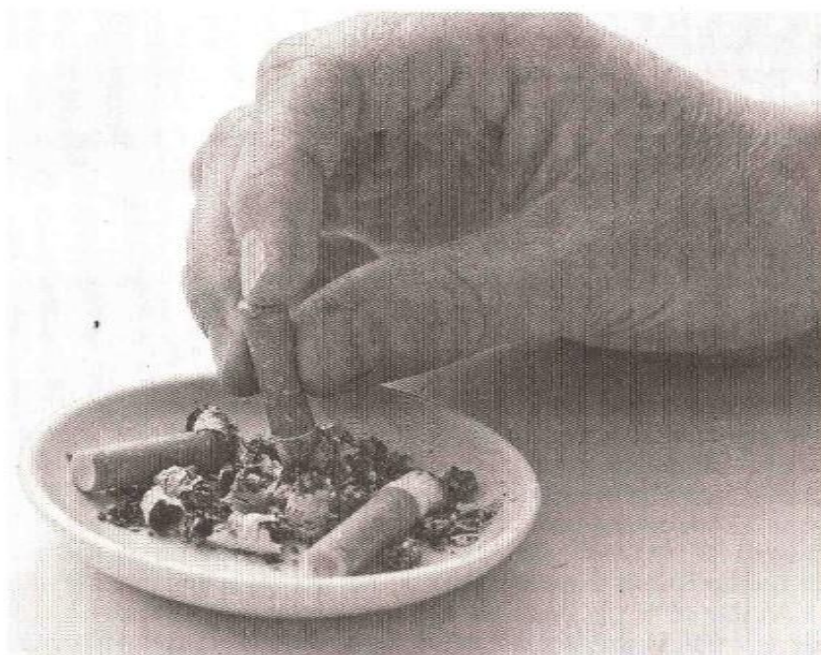
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Chennai:

**S**MOKING is one of the key habits leading to serious ailments, including cancer. However, less than 30 per cent of smokers have a health insurance policy, which is largely a general health cover, finds a study.

A multi-city study done by ICICI Lombard, reaching out to 245,373 people, including both smokers and non-smokers, found that only 29 per cent of the smokers had any health cover. The large majority of smokers never had a health policy and there was a small minority who were not even aware of owning a cover.

However, those declaring their smoking habit while purchasing a policy is very miniscule. "A large number of customers do not declare smoking in the proposal form and hence the analysis shows a skewed figure. As per the data only one per cent of company's total health insurance customers are smokers," said Sasikumar Adidamu, Chief Technical Officer, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance.



Among those owned a policy, majority- 53 per cent- had a regular policy that would largely be reimbursement of hospitalization expenses. Around 42 per cent had a policy with critical illness cover and only five per cent had a policy with high deduction, finds the ICICI Lombard study.

For a similar set of diseases' treatment, average claim size of smokers is 30 per cent higher than non-smokers, as per the last three year data of Bajaj Allianz. "We have observed that claimants for ailments related to circulatory diseases such as coronary artery diseases, Ischaemic Heart Diseases

and respiratory diseases such as Respiratory tract infections, Disorders of sinuses, Pneumonia, Bronchitis and Asthma are largely smokers," said Adidamu.

However, among the smokers, just a miniscule 0.61 per cent has quit smoking in recent times. Those who have quit smoking are hardly bothered about the rising cost of cigarettes. Only 19 per cent quit due to the cost and only 17 per cent of men were worried about it. Slightly higher share of women (24 per cent) felt the pinch of higher cigarette prices. Largely people quit due to family pressures.

Several insurance companies have come up with wellness initiatives with a focus on preventive care and persuading smokers to quit is one among them.

"The insurance company has to incentivise the policy holders who quit smoking and cut their risk. We have started providing such people with reward points. In the future it is possible that people may choose to quit because of such initiatives," said Sanjay Datta, Chief - Underwriting, Claims & Reinsurance, ICICI Lombard.