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2.5 Million Smokers Think They are Using Brands that Might be Less Harmful

Are additive-free cigarettes or those labeled “natural” safer than other brands?

A population study, published in the journal [Tobacco Control](#) this month, shows that more than 2.5 million smokers in United States believe the answer is yes. University of California San Diego School of Medicine researchers found that the majority of American Spirits Mellow (67 percent) and American Spirits Full-Bodied (55 percent) cigarette consumers believe their brand might be less harmful. Tobacco manufacturers are legally restricted from making such claims.

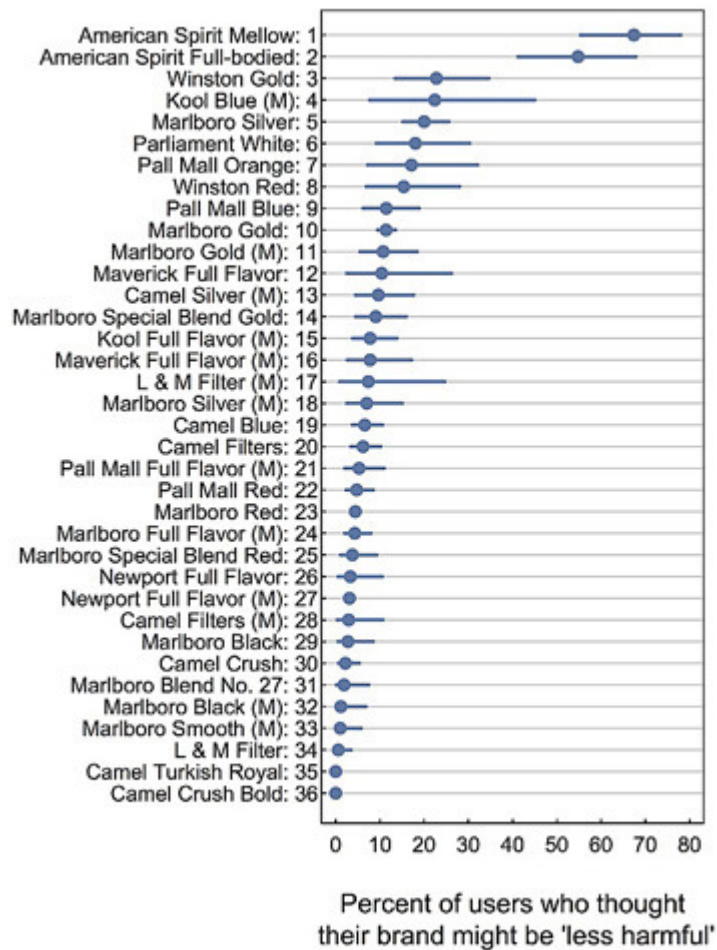
In 2009, the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act banned the use of the terms “light” and “mild” on cigarette marketing to reduce the misperception that these brands were safer than those without such labels. The brands with the highest number of consumers who believe their cigarettes were safer were products advertised as light or mild before the 2009 act went into effect.

Current marketing of tobacco products using words such as “natural” may be taking advantage of the popularity of organic and chemical-free products, said Eric C. Leas, first author and a graduate student at UC San Diego.

“It’s not just the term ‘additive-free’ that might be leading consumers to think American Spirits might be less harmful,” said Leas. “Other recent studies have suggested that features included in American Spirits’ packaging and marketing, such the use of ‘100 percent organic tobacco’ might convey that the cigarettes are safer.”

But studies show that American Spirits do have high concentrations of known human carcinogens, similar to other tobacco ciagrettes.

“The notion that tobacco is natural or organic is confusing, because it is actually the combustion of the natural tobacco leaf that makes tobacco smoking harmful,” said John P. Pierce, PhD, professor emeritus of Family Medicine and Public Health at UC San Diego and senior author of the study.



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