

The True Cost of **Risky Behavior**

Consequences of good and bad health habits are boiled down to 30-minute slices of your life

> We all know that smoking is bad for our health and that eating vegetables is good for it. Yet how bad and how good are they? Without a clear notion of threat and reward, it is that much harder to avoid a cigarette or to choke down a serving of broccoli. "I hate when someone tells me that something is risky," says David Spiegelhalter, a professor of risk assessment at the University of Cambridge. "Well, compared to what?"

To answer his own question, Spiegelhalter converted reams of statistical risk tables into a simple metric: a microlife-30 minutes. If you smoke two cigarettes, you lose 30 minutes of your life (top graphic). Exercise for 20 minutes, and you gain two units of microlife. Over time bad habits accelerate your aging, and good habits slow it down (bottom graphic). "That seems to resonate with people," Spiegelhalter says. "No one likes to get older faster." -Mark Fischetti

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SOURCE: DAVID SPIEGELHALTER Statistical Laboratory, University of Cambridge

Death



NOTE: Data are based on lifelong habits for men, ages 35 and up, averaged over large populations. Data for women are similar. No loss or gain can be attributed to a single event, such as one cigarette or one exercise session.

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