Cigarette smoking is the most common drug addiction. The standard model of tobacco addiction posits that persistent smoking is motivated by smokers’ need to avoid nicotine withdrawal, requiring regular smoking to maintain blood nicotine levels. This model is challenged by the observation that many smokers (25 percent of U.S. adult smokers) do not smoke every day. Data from a just-completed study of intermittent smokers (ITS) addresses questions such as: Do ITS absorb nicotine when they smoke? Do they suffer craving and withdrawal when they abstain? Are they able to quit easily? Are they predominantly social smokers? The behavior of ITS suggests that our models of dependence—on other substances as well as nicotine—should be revised.

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