

It is a well known fact that smoking is injurious to health, however, the story does not end here. A recent study warns that middle-aged male smokers with high blood pressure and raised cholesterol levels can give up the ghost about a decade earlier than their healthier counterparts.

Not a hundred or a thousand, but 19,000 people were tested in a survey and followed up 38 years later to prove this theory. Hence, it emphasises the hazardous effects of smoking and promoting the importance of a healthy lifestyle generally in the masses.

This study has been published in the *British Medical Journal* recently, by Dr Robert Clarke from the University of Oxford. It was designed to find out the extent to which high blood pressure, smoking and cholesterol cut life expectancy. The study warns that middle-aged male smokers with high

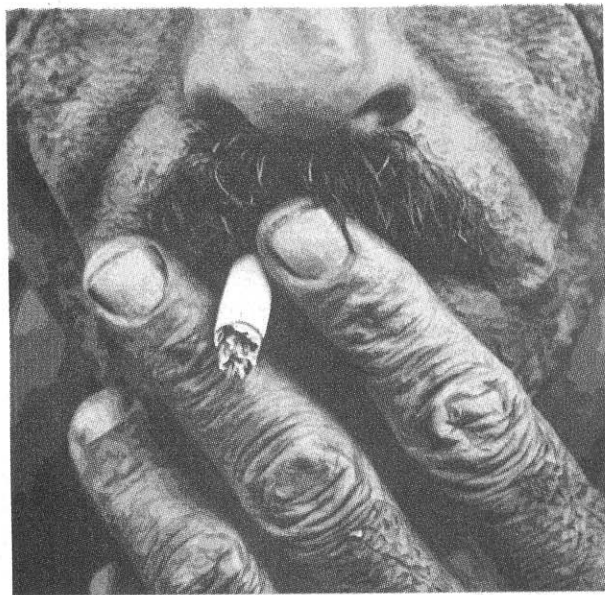
blood pressure and raised cholesterol levels face dying about a decade earlier than their healthier counterparts from 50 years of age.

The study was started in 1967-70. All 19,000 participants aged 40-69 had their height, weight, blood pressure, lung functioning, cholesterol and blood glucose levels measured and recorded. It also completed a questionnaire regarding their previous medical history, smoking habits, employment grade and marital status.

At the start of the study 42 per cent of the men were smokers, 39 per cent had high blood pressure and 51 per cent had high cholesterol.

They were followed up nearly 40 years later in 2005 by which time 13,501 had died. However, the life expectancy of men, who had all three of the major risk factors, was cut by 10 years from the age of 50—down to 73 from 83 years.

# Smoking hazards



While those who have none of these risk factors can expect to live until 83.

Since the 1970s death rates from heart diseases have been dropping at a snail's pace as people have stopped smoking and improving their diet and lifestyle. The study only involved men but its findings applied to women as well.

The research was conducted to encourage people to give up smoking and adopt a better and healthier lifestyle. If smoking is given up and measures are taken to deal with high blood pressure and obesity, it will lead to increased life expectancy. It has also proved that modest differences in heart risk factors can accurately predict significant differences in life expectancy.

All men and women over 40 should have a health check, which includes monitoring blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Programmes to discourage smoking, promoting healthy eating and leading active lifestyles should be encouraged from the childhood in order to prevent these avoidable risk factors. People from the disadvantaged background are more likely to die younger as they tend to smoke more, eat less healthy diets and suffer more from psychosocial stress. They are in the dire need of help. ■