

SCIENCE NEWS®

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

A Science Service Publication
Volume 133, No. 24, June 11, 1988

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Subscription Department
231 West Center Street, Marion, Ohio 43305

Subscription rate: 1 yr., \$34.50; 2 yrs., \$58.00.
(Foreign postage \$6.00 additional per year.) Change of
address: Four to six weeks' notice is required. Please
state exactly how magazine is to be addressed.
Include zip code. For new subscriptions only call
(1) 800-247-2160. Printed in U.S.A. Second class
postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional
mailing offices. Title registered as trademark U.S. and
Canadian Patent Offices. Published every Saturday by
SCIENCE SERVICE, Inc., 1719 N St., N.W.,
Washington, D.C. 20036. (202-785-2255)
ISSN 0036-8423

Letters

Never too late to quit

In "Smoking: Clues to its heart effects" (SN: 4/30/88, p.279), it is suggested that the increased incidence of atherosclerosis and coronary heart disease in smokers "could be through the action of cigarette smoke in modifying low-density lipoproteins . . . enhancing their role in the laying down of artery-clogging plaque." The epidemiologic evidence that the risk of coronary artery disease among ex-smokers is similar to the risk of nonsmokers within one to two years after quitting suggests that this cannot be a major mechanism in the role of cigarettes in increasing heart disease risk. If the action were primarily through effects early in the development of atherosclerosis or cumulative effects, one would expect that the risk in ex-smokers would approach the risk of

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Cover: Divorce on a continental scale is depicted by three frames that span 80 million years of supercomputer-simulated plate tectonics. Such simulations show how geoscientists are beginning to view the earth as one complete system, composed of many different but interconnected parts. Green bars represent continents embedded in buoyant plates afloat on the earth's mantle. Colors denote mantle temperatures (yellow is hot, blue is cold). The sequence shows how a large supercontinent insulates the mantle and drives up the temperature of the rock below until a hot, rising section of the mantle splits the continent. (Images: M. Gurnis)



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nonsmokers only slowly over time since quitting, as does the risk of ex-smokers for lung cancer.

It is important to make this point, because if long-term smokers believe the damage has already been done, they will see little incentive to quit smoking.

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Director

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DNA or ERA?

Diane Edwards' "Genetic selfishness in an all-male club" (SN: 4/30/88, p.279) may attract female readers who feel strongly about

all-male (social) clubs, but I would prefer to do without such anthropomorphisms.

It is bad enough that the researchers themselves refer to chromosomes as "selfish" and *psr* as "trickery" and a "spreading infection." I see no reason your journal needs to carry this unscientific labeling further forward.

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Please limit letters to 250 words.

JUNE 11, 1988

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