

Initial preferences for menthol cigarettes and subsequent changes in preferences and smoking cessation among adult smokers from the United States: Findings from the ITC 4 Country Surveys, 2002-2020

Pete Driezen¹, Shannon Gravely¹, Karin A. Kasza², Mary E. Thompson¹, K. Michael Cummings³, Andrew Hyland², Geoffrey T. Fong^{1,4}

¹University of Waterloo ²Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center ³Medical University of South Carolina ⁴Ontario Institute for Cancer Research

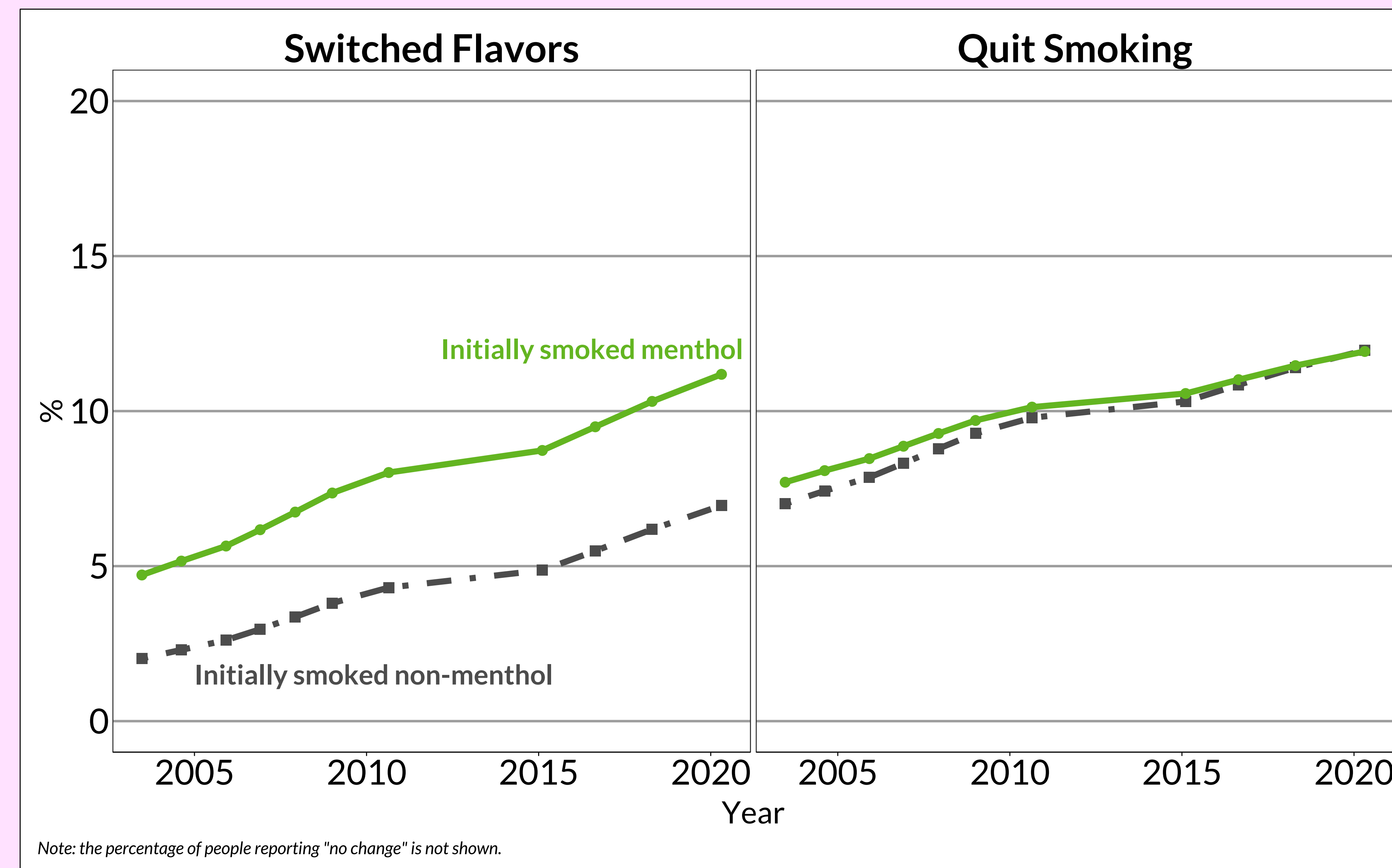
KEY RESULTS

- Overall, 28.2% of respondents reported using a menthol brand at their initial survey wave.
- Changes in use (switching and cessation) increased significantly over time ($p < 0.01$).
- Switching and cessation did not differ by sex ($p = 0.32$) or age group ($p = 0.78$) but differed significantly by race/ethnicity ($p < 0.01$).
- Black people who smoked non-menthol brands had 13.7 times the odds of switching to menthol (vs no change) compared to White people who smoked non-menthol (95% CI: 8.5-22.0).
- Black people who smoked menthol brands had significantly lower odds of quitting (vs no change) than White people who smoked menthol (aOR=0.7, 95%CI: 0.5-1.0).

CONCLUSIONS

Switching from menthol to non-menthol was more common than switching from non-menthol to menthol, except among Black people. Black people who smoked menthol were less likely to quit smoking than White people who smoked menthol. Smoking cessation support must consider the unique needs of people from different racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Switching from menthol to non-menthol brands was more common.

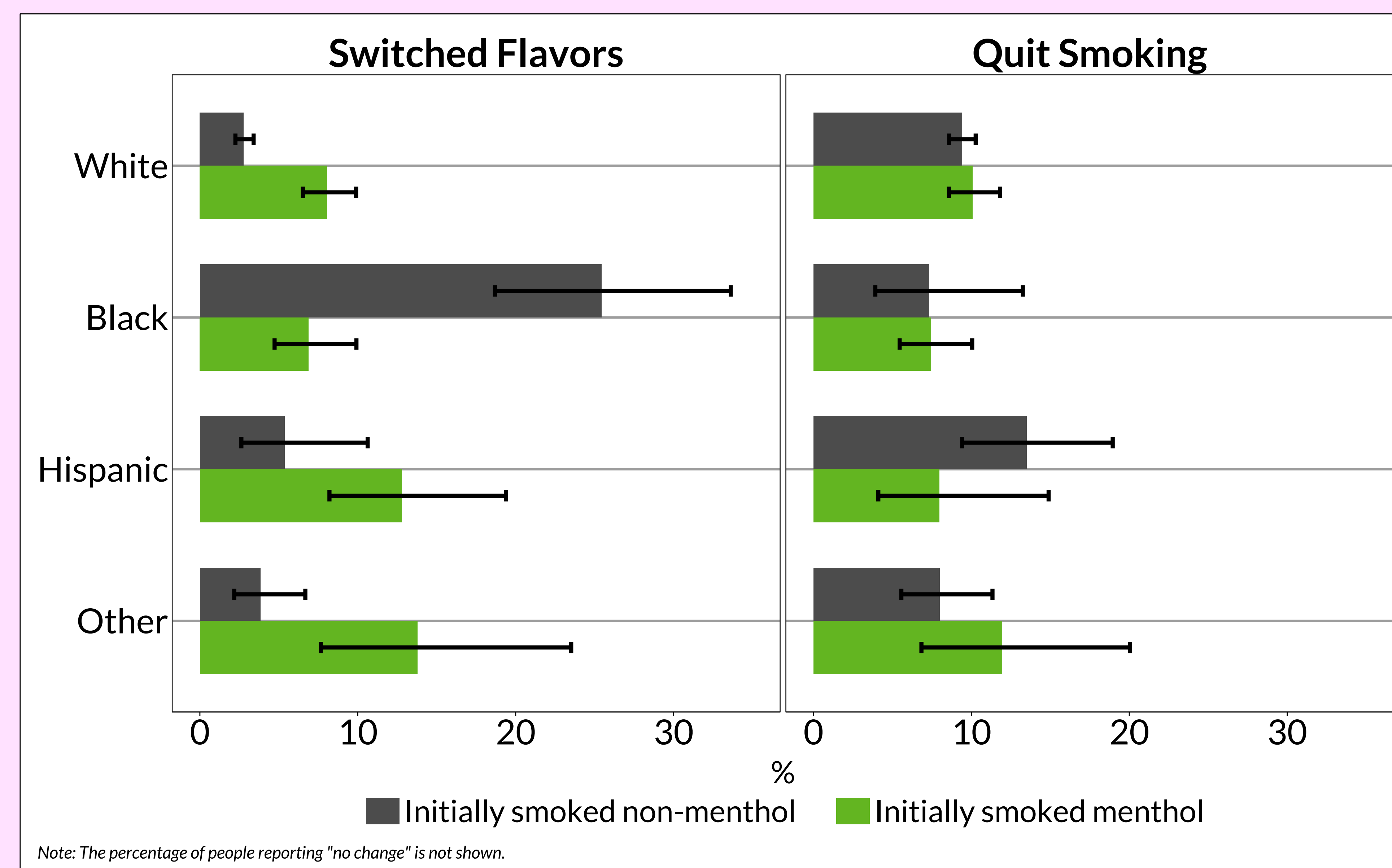


Across all waves, **7.4% of people who smoked a menthol brand** switched to a non-menthol brand by the subsequent wave.

Only **3.8% of people who smoked a non-menthol brand** switched to a menthol brand ($p < 0.01$).

Cessation rates did not differ significantly by initial flavor smoked (**menthol = 9.7%, non-menthol = 9.3%**, $p = 0.65$).

Black people who smoked non-menthol were more likely to switch to menthol.



Switching **differed by race/ethnicity:**

25.4% of Black people who smoked a **non-menthol brand** switched to menthol (whereas only 6.9% of Black people who smoked menthol switched, $p < 0.01$).

Within all race/ethnic groups, cessation rates did not differ by initial flavor smoked.

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DISCLOSURES: KMC has and continues to serve as a paid expert witness in litigation filed against cigarette manufacturers. GTF has served as an expert witness or consultant for governments defending their country's policies or regulations in litigation. GTF and SG served as paid expert consultants to the Ministry of Health of Singapore in reviewing the evidence on plain/standardized packaging. All other authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

BACKGROUND

Most adults who smoke maintain consistent preferences for menthol or non-menthol cigarette brands over time. However, people who prefer menthol brand cigarettes have been shown in some studies to have greater difficulty quitting. This study examined the association between initial preferences for menthol or non-menthol brands and subsequent changes in preferences and smoking cessation from 2002 to 2020 in the US.

METHODS

- N=5435 adult respondents (18+) who smoked at least monthly and participated in at least 2 consecutive waves of the ITC US Survey from 2002 to 2020.
- Use of menthol cigarettes** was classified according to self-reported brand.
- Smoking cessation** was defined as having quit for at least 30 days at follow-up.
- Weighted multinomial logistic regression was used to model change in use (no change, switched flavors, or quit smoking) as a function of initial flavor smoked (menthol vs non-menthol). Models were fit using generalized estimating equations.
- Adjusted for** time-in-sample, sex, age group, race/ethnicity (non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, non-Hispanic Other), income, education, employment, survey wave, cigarettes smoked/day, intentions to quit, and attempts to quit in the past 12 months.
- Results are presented as predictive margins (i.e., adjusted percentages) and adjusted odds ratios (aOR).