

TOBACCO

WHAT IS TOBACCO?

Tobacco products are made from the leaf of the tobacco plant. Tobacco is smoked as cigarettes, cigars, and pipe tobacco. It is also used without smoking, as chewing tobacco and snuff. Tobacco smoke contains over 4,000 chemicals, including many hazardous carcinogens such as arsenic, benzene, and formaldehyde; toxins such as cyanide, ammonia, and acetone, and carbon dioxide.

WHAT IS THE DRUG IN TOBACCO?

Nicotine is the active drug in tobacco. This drug enters the body when a person breathes tobacco smoke or chews tobacco. It is a stimulant and affects the heart, the rest of the circulatory system, the nervous system, and the levels of some hormones. Its immediate effects on the body are a faster heartbeat and increased blood pressure. These effects last only a short time.

WHAT ARE THE SHORT TERM HEALTH PROBLEMS OF SMOKING?

These include coughing, shortness of breath and other breathing problems, possible heart problems, reduced endurance, and more frequent colds and illness due to irritation and lowered immunity.

WHAT ARE THE LONG TERM HEALTH DANGERS OF SMOKING?

Tobacco contains many cancer causing compounds, or carcinogens. Smoking causes cancers of the lung and other parts of the body. Pipe smoking is linked to cancer of the lip. Pipe and cigar smokers run a greater risk of cancer of the mouth, larynx, and esophagus.

Tars also cause respiratory problems such as bronchitis and emphysema, and cardiovascular disease.

Nicotine raises blood pressure and heart rate. Carbon monoxide in tobacco smoke reduces the availability of oxygen to cells throughout the body. Together, these factors reduce circulation and can cause cardiovascular problems, including stroke.

Nicotine is also very addictive. Because it is extremely difficult to stop using tobacco, the health damage from tobacco abuse often continues for years. The final result is often the death of the smoker. The causes of premature death from tobacco are cardiovascular disease (43%), cancer (36%), and respiratory disease (20%) (1). Over 430,000 people die each year in the United States from problems caused by smoking (2), making tobacco the most deadly substance used today. Even smokers in their 30's and 40's are at risk. They are five times more likely to have a heart attack than non-smokers (3).

DO PEOPLE BECOME DEPENDENT ON TOBACCO?

The Surgeon General of the United States has stated that cigarette smoking is an addiction (4). In 1995, the United States government categorized nicotine as a drug and assigned regulation of tobacco to the Food and Drug Administration. Tobacco users become psychologically and physically dependent on the nicotine in tobacco products. Nicotine has effects in the brain similar to drugs such as heroin and cocaine (5). It is considered by many to be the most addicting drug, more addicting than heroin, cocaine, alcohol, and marijuana (6).

Dependence is facilitated by the smoking process. Each puff delivers



nicotine to the brain rapidly. Additional puffs give continuous behavioral reinforcement through the smoker's waking hours each day.

A tobacco user who stops using it will experience withdrawal symptoms. The user can become irritable, restless, and anxious. They may tremble or be unable to sleep. These uncomfortable symptoms make it difficult to stop. Using tobacco seems to "relax" a user because the new dose of nicotine stops the withdrawal symptoms. Nicotine does not cause true relaxation.

DOES SMOKING CAUSE OTHER PROBLEMS?

Smoking interferes with normal breathing and can cause shortness of breath, which interferes with sports and many other activities. This can occur long before more serious health problems begin.

Non-health effects of smoking include smoke smell on the breath and in the smoker's clothes and hair. Fingers and teeth are stained. Exposure to smoke also causes a condition called "smoker's face," increased wrinkling of the skin of the face. (7) Ashes and

burn marks damage clothing, cars, and furniture. Smoke smell and stains affect rooms and cars where smoking takes place. Smoke damages audio, video, computer, and other electronic equipment. This causes down time and the cost of cleaning and repair. Smoking costs money. Tobacco products themselves are costly. A pack-a-day smoker spends hundreds of dollars a year on cigarettes. Life and health insurance cost more for smokers. Smoking is also a leading cause of fires, which injure and kill people and damage buildings, other property, and forests.

DOES SMOKING DURING PREGNANCY CAUSE ANY RISKS?

Smoking tobacco reduces the amount of oxygen that the mother's blood carries. It also constricts blood vessels. These effects reduce the oxygen carried to the unborn baby. A woman who smokes during pregnancy is more likely to lose her baby through miscarriage (8), stillbirth, or death soon after birth. Smoking also increases the risk of a premature birth, and of a baby with low birth weight. (9) Low birth weight is a sign of poor infant health. Smaller babies tend to need more special care after birth.

Smoking by the mother during pregnancy is a cause for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). (10) Recent research concludes that nicotine itself is the factor causing SIDS, and that pregnant women should abstain from nicotine patches or gum as well as from smoking itself. (11) Smoking by mothers during pregnancy also increases the risk of sleep disturbances (apneas) in their infants. This risk is even greater if both parents smoked. (12) Smoking also reduces the mother's milk production. (13)

Women who are pregnant, considering becoming pregnant, or breastfeeding should not use any tobacco products.

DOES SMOKING BY PARENTS AFFECT THE HEALTH OF THEIR CHILDREN?

Exposure to tobacco smoke after birth increases a child's risk of death from SIDS (14, 15), fires, and pneumonia. It also causes health problems including coughing, wheezing, pneumonia, bronchitis, middle ear infections, and asthma. (16, 17) Smoking by the father increases the cancer risk of their children when those children reach adulthood. (18)

Research suggests that smoking by the mother during or after pregnancy increases behavioral problems of her child. (19) Also, presence of one or more smokers in the household is associated with significantly worse behavioral and emotional health of a child. (20)

WHY DO PEOPLE SMOKE?

People begin to smoke for many reasons. Sixty percent of smokers begin before the age of 15, and many begin younger. (21) Young people can be influenced by cigarette advertisements and promotions. They may also be affected by social pressure if parents, brothers and sisters, or friends smoke. Some young people may start in order to defy those who want them not to smoke, or to feel more grown up.

Smokers continue to smoke for a number of reasons. The main reason is that smokers are physically addicted to the nicotine, and keep smoking to avoid withdrawal symptoms. In addition, nervousness, habit, or being around others who smoke tend to keep smokers smoking.

HOW MANY PEOPLE SMOKE CIGARETTES?

The 1996 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse showed 18.3 percent of youth aged 12 to 17 were current cigarette smokers (had smoked in the past month). Among adults aged 18 to 25, 38.3 percent had smoked in the past month. Combining all age groups 12 and older, 28.9 percent had smoked in the past month. (22)

The 1997 national "Monitoring the Future" survey of school students showed 19.4 percent of 8th graders, 29.8 percent of 10th graders, and 36.5 percent of 12th graders had smoked cigarettes in the past month. Use levels at all three grades has increased over the past few years. Use of smokeless tobacco in the past month was reported by 5.5 percent of 8th graders, 8.9 percent of 10th graders, and 9.7 percent of 12th graders. These use levels have decreased slightly over the past several years. (23)

DOES TOBACCO SMOKE HARM NONSMOKERS?

"Sidestream" or "secondhand" smoke can produce many ill effects on nonsmokers. These include eye irritation, headaches, nose and throat discomfort, and even serious allergic reactions. Passive smoke can also cause lung cancer in a nonsmoker (24). People who suffer from chronic heart or lung disease are very vulnerable to cigarette smoke.

To protect people from these smoke effects, Michigan laws prohibit smoking in schools and most other public buildings. Laws also limit smoking in areas such as restaurants and food stores.

IS THERE A SAFE LEVEL OF TOBACCO USE?

There is no level of tobacco use which is safe or healthy. Tobacco products, used as intended, cause poor health and death. Tobacco causes addiction very quickly. The safest level is no tobacco at all. If a person smokes or uses smokeless tobacco, the healthiest course is to stop as soon as possible and never use again.

HOW CAN A PERSON GET HELP QUITTING?

Many forms of help exist. One first step can be to talk with a physician.

Nicotine chewing gum or a skin "patch" may be used to reduce craving. A physician can help a person decide if such nicotine replacement will help with withdrawal symptoms. Nicotine replacement must be done carefully. It is more likely to help when used along with a smoking cessation program.

Books, tapes, and other materials may have helpful ideas. Some people use hypnosis, counseling, or support groups. Certain diets may help some people.

It is very helpful to take part in a "stop smoking" program. Such programs are offered by the American Cancer Society, American Lung Association, and local health departments. Many employers help provide programs for their workers.

Some smokers quit gradually. Others stop smoking all at once ("cold turkey"). Most smokers try several times before they stop smoking permanently. No matter what methods are tried, the support of family and others can be very helpful.

TIPS FOR QUITTING:

The only truly safe choice is not to smoke at all, so keep trying to quit. But for someone who can't quit completely yet, cutting down does help. Here are some tips for reducing smoking.

- * Smoke fewer cigarettes each day.
- * Don't smoke the cigarette all the way to the end.
- * Take fewer puffs on each cigarette.
- * Reduce the amount of smoke you inhale.
- * Decide NOT to smoke at certain places. Add to these places.
- * Decide NOT to smoke at certain times. Increase these times.
- * Keep trying to quit. Keep trying until you succeed.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF USING SMOKELESS TOBACCO?

Smokeless tobacco includes chewing tobacco and snuff. These have serious health dangers. They are NOT safer than smoking.

Nicotine from smokeless tobacco is absorbed into the blood stream and has the same effects on the body as in smoking. "Chew" and "snuff" irritate the gums, stain the gums and teeth, and can cause tooth loss and receding gums. Using smokeless tobacco increases the risk of cancer of the lip and jaw.

Spitting tobacco juice stains clothing and other items. It is unsanitary. Spitting is very unattractive to most people.

LEGAL INFORMATION

Tobacco products may be sold only to those over eighteen years of age. Vendors who sell to minors and minors who purchase or use tobacco may be fined.

Michigan law prohibits smoking in schools and public buildings. Smoking is limited in restaurants and food stores.

For years, some communities restricted or eliminated sale of tobacco products in vending machines. At this time, however, Michigan law prevents (preempts) any new local ordinances to control tobacco sales.

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