

SMOKELESS TOBACCO

As the term suggests, smokeless tobacco describes a variety of tobacco products that are not smoked by the consumer. These products, which include snuff, dip and chewing tobacco, are less harmful than smoking, but are still extremely hazardous to your health.

1. Smokeless Tobacco Contains Harmful Chemicals

Smokeless tobacco is known to contain 28 carcinogens, including very high levels of tobacco-specific nitrosamines (TSNAs). TSNAs are known to be some of the most potent carcinogens present in chewing tobacco, snuff and tobacco smoke. Other cancer-causing substances in smokeless tobacco include:

- formaldehyde, arsenic, cadmium, radioactive polonium-210

2. Smokeless Tobacco Products Cause Cancer

People who use dip or chewing tobacco increase their risk of oral cancer by 50% as compared to those who do not use these products; this includes cancer of the lip, tongue, cheek, roof and floor of the mouth, as well as cancer of the larynx. Smokeless tobacco users also face an increased risk of pancreatic cancer.

3. Smokeless Tobacco Is Addictive

Dip and chewing tobacco contain more nicotine than commercially manufactured cigarettes. A typical dose of nicotine in snuff is 3.6 milligrams (mg); in chewing tobacco, the amount of nicotine is closer to 4.5 mg. The difference in nicotine level is significant when compared to a commercially produced cigarette, which has an average of 1 to 2 mg of nicotine. And when used according to package directions, the nicotine in smokeless tobacco is easily absorbed through the lining of the mouth in quantities sufficient to cause addiction.

4. Smokeless Tobacco Causes Gum Disease, Bone Loss, Leukoplakia and Tooth Decay

Smokeless tobacco creates an unhealthy environment in the mouth that leads to a variety of nasty problems. In addition to brown-stained teeth and bad breath, users also face:

- Permanent gum recession and bone loss where the tobacco rests
- Leukoplakia, a condition characterized by benign or precancerous lesions on the tongue or inside of the cheeks
- Tooth decay from the sugar used to enhance the flavor of smokeless tobacco

5. Smokeless Tobacco and Other Health Problems

While the results are inconclusive at this time, researchers are reviewing possible links between smokeless tobacco and heart disease, high blood pressure, the risk of stroke and diabetes.

Smokeless Tobacco and Harm Reduction

Smokeless tobacco is less deadly than cigarette smoking -- there is no disputing that. With over 4000 chemical compounds in cigarette smoke, hundreds of which are known to be poisonous, and dozens that are carcinogenic, smoking is by far the most hazardous form of tobacco use on the planet today.

That said, smokeless tobacco poses serious risks to the user that do not make this class of tobacco product a safe alternative to smoking.

Cigarette smoking is part addiction to nicotine and part habit, born out of many years of associating smoking with every activity we have in our daily lives. Smokers who switch to smokeless tobacco are still addicted to nicotine and still link tobacco to the activities in their lives. Because of this, the risk of a smoking relapse is substantial.

Using harm reduction as a fix for smoking can also be dis-empowering. While a person might think of the switch as a proactive move to improve one's health, they are also telling themselves -- usually on a subconscious level -- that they are not strong enough to quit using tobacco altogether. And to make matters worse, this justification can in turn become a pacifier, causing the user to put quitting tobacco on the back burner indefinitely.

Smokeless Tobacco As a Quit Aid

All tobacco products carry the risk of disease and addiction, and as such are not good choices as quit aids.