

The Risks of Tobacco Use



Many people think that the only people harmed by tobacco use are smokers who have smoked for a long time. The fact is that tobacco use can be harmful to **everyone**. This includes unborn babies and people who don't smoke.

If you smoke cigarettes, cigars, or pipes, or use smokeless tobacco like chew and snuff, the best thing you can do for yourself and for everyone around you is quit.

This publication was written by the American Academy of Pediatrics to inform parents and teens about the many health risks related to tobacco use and tips on how to help smokers quit.

Smoking harms infants and children

When parents expose their children to smoke, or let others do so, they are putting their children's health in danger and sending a message that smoking is OK.

Secondhand smoke is the smoke a smoker breathes out. It's also the smoke that comes from the tip of lit cigarettes, pipes, and cigars. It contains about 4,000 different chemicals, many of which cause cancer. Because of exposure to secondhand smoke, about 3,400 nonsmokers die from lung cancer every year and 22,000 to 69,000 nonsmokers die from heart disease every year.

Breathing in smoke can cause

- Asthma
- Respiratory infections (like bronchitis and pneumonia)
- Lung problems
- Ear infections
- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) (for babies younger than 1 year)

The best way to protect infants and children from smoke is to make your home and car smoke free *all* the time.

Smoking harms unborn babies

Smoking during pregnancy or exposing pregnant women to smoke can lead to many serious health problems for an unborn baby, such as

- Miscarriage
- Premature birth (born not fully developed)
- Lower birth weight than expected (possibly meaning a less healthy baby)
- SIDS
- Learning problems and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Smoking harms teens

Every day thousands of teens try smoking for the first time. About one third of them will die of a smoking-related disease. Other teen smokers may experience the same health problems as adult smokers, including

- Addiction to nicotine
- Long-term cough
- Faster heart rate
- Lung problems

- Higher blood pressure
- Less stamina and endurance
- Higher risk of lung cancer and other cancers
- More respiratory infections

Smoking also gives you bad breath, yellow teeth, and yellow fingernails; makes your hair and clothes smell bad; and wrinkles your skin.

Smoking harms adults

Smoking is the most preventable cause of death in the United States. Think about the following facts.

- Every year in this country about 438,000 people die from diseases related to smoking. According to the American Cancer Society, smoking kills more people than alcohol, car crashes, suicide, AIDS, murder, and drugs combined.
- Smoking causes 87% of lung cancer deaths. Lung cancer is the leading type of cancer in men and women.
- In addition to cancer, smoking also causes heart disease, stroke, chronic lung problems, and many other diseases.

It's time to quit!

Thousands of Americans have found a way to stop smoking. You can too. People who quit smoking live longer, healthier lives. They look and feel better. They save money and are great role models for others. Most importantly, they can help improve the health of their children and other family members.

How to quit

Quitting can be difficult, but it's not impossible. Here are some tips that might help.

- **Think of reasons why you want to quit** like
 - You don't like having bad breath and stained teeth.
 - You don't want to risk getting cancer.
 - You don't like being addicted to nicotine.
 - You want to start leading a healthier life.
 - You do not want to waste your money.
 - Your family and friends don't like it.
- **Pick a quit date** and throw out all your cigarettes.
- **Tell people you are quitting and ask for support and encouragement.** This includes friends, family members, coworkers, teachers, and coaches. Ask friends not to offer you cigarettes. Invite a friend to quit with you.
- **Ask your doctor about ways to quit.** Learn everything you can about quitting. There are many tools available to help people stop smoking. These include nicotine replacement therapy (if you are old enough) in the form of chewing gum, skin patches, nasal sprays, inhalers, and lozenges; medicine to help curb cravings; counseling (telephone-based, Web-based, or face-to-face); and support groups.

- **Break the habit.** Think of where and when you usually smoke, and figure out what you can do to break that habit even *before* you quit. If you always smoke first thing when you wake up, do an exercise tape or DVD instead. If you always smoke after a meal, go for a walk with a family member or friend instead! If you smoke with your friends at work during breaks, do something else to keep your hands busy. Video games can also help to break the habit by keeping both hands occupied.
- **Find alternatives to smoking.** Drink water or a low-calorie drink, chew sugarless gum, or enjoy a healthy snack such as pumpkin or sunflower seeds, or apple slices. Plan ahead and be ready for the challenges you'll face while quitting.
- **Keep your mind busy.** Find activities to keep your mind off smoking like working on a hobby, listening to music, talking to a friend, or exercising.
- **Reward yourself.** Take the money that you would have spent on tobacco and buy something for yourself.

Smoking and the media

Many young people know smoking is not healthy but still think it's cool. A big reason for this is the media. Tobacco companies spend billions of dollars every year promoting their products at stores where they are sold, in magazines, and at sporting events. Most ads are designed to trick you by showing smokers as healthy, energetic, sexy, and successful. There are also many TV and movie scenes showing people smoking. These TV and movie scenes promote the idea that lots of people smoke and rarely show the bad consequences of smoking.

The following are things parents can do to help children understand the influence of the media:

- Talk about ads with your children. Help them to understand the real messages in these ads.
- Teach your children to be wary consumers and not to believe everything they see and hear on TV.
- Make sure the TV shows and movies your children watch do not show smoking as cool or glamorous.
- Don't let your children wear T-shirts, jackets, or hats that promote tobacco products.
- Talk with your children's school about starting a media education program.

Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics
Julius B. Richmond Center of Excellence
www.aap.org/richmondcenter

American Cancer Society
 800/ACS-2345 (800/227-2345)
www.cancer.org

American Heart Association
 800/AHA-USA1 (800/242-8721)
www.americanheart.org

American Lung Association
 800/LUNGUSA (800/586-4872)
www.lungusa.org

SmokeFree.gov
 800/QUITNOW (800/784-8669)
www.smokefree.gov

Please note: Listing of resources does not imply an endorsement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP is not responsible for the content of the resources mentioned in this publication. Phone numbers and Web site addresses are as current as possible, but may change at any time.

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From your doctor

