



Tips for Teens: The Truth About Tobacco

Slang--Cigarettes: Smokes, Cigs, Butts. Smokeless Tobacco: Chew, Dip, Spit Tobacco, Snuff

→ Get the Facts...

Tobacco damages your health. Smoking is the most common cause of lung cancer. Smoking is also a leading cause of cancer of the mouth, throat, bladder, pancreas, and kidney. Smokeless tobacco can cause mouth cancer, tooth loss, and other health problems.

Tobacco affects your body's development. Smoking is particularly harmful for teens because your body is still growing and changing. The 200 known poisons in cigarette smoke affect your normal development and can cause life-threatening diseases, such as chronic bronchitis, heart disease, and stroke.

Tobacco is addictive. Cigarettes contain nicotine--a powerfully addictive substance. Three-quarters of young people who use tobacco daily continue to do so because they find it hard to quit.

Tobacco can kill you. Smoking is the leading preventable cause of death in this country. More than 400,000 Americans die from tobacco-related causes each year, and most of them began using tobacco before the age of 18.

→ Before You Risk It...

Know the law. It is illegal for anyone under 18 to buy cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, or tobacco-related products.

Stay Informed. Addiction to tobacco is hard to control. More than 90 percent of teens who use tobacco daily experience at least one symptom of withdrawal when they try to quit.

Keep your edge. The poisons in cigarettes can affect your appearance. Smoking can dry your skin out and cause wrinkles. Some research even relates smoking to premature gray hair and hair loss.

Be aware. It can be hard to play sports if you use tobacco. Smoking causes shortness of breath and dizziness, and chewing tobacco causes dehydration.

Think of others. Smoking puts the health of your friends and family at risk. Approximately 3,000 nonsmokers die of lung cancer each year from breathing other peoples' smoke.

Get the facts. Each day more than 3,000 people under age 18 become regular smokers. That's more than 1 million teens per year. Roughly one-third of them will eventually die from a tobacco-related disease.

Look around you. Even though a lot of teens use tobacco, most don't. According to a 1998 study, less than 20 percent of teens are regular smokers. In fact, 64 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds have never even tried a cigarette.

→ Know the Signs...

How can you tell if a friend is using tobacco? Sometimes it's tough to tell. But there are signs you can look for. If your friend has one or more of the following signs, he or she may be regularly using tobacco:

- Wheezing
- Coughing
- Bad breath
- Smelly hair and clothes
- Yellow -stained teeth and fingers
- Frequent colds
- Decreased senses of smell and taste
- Difficulty keeping up with sports and athletic activities
- Bleeding gums (smokeless tobacco)
- Frequent mouth sores (smokeless tobacco)

What can you do to help someone who is using tobacco? Be a real friend. Encourage your friend to quit. For information and referrals, call the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 800-729-6686.

Q&A



Q. Doesn't smoking help you relax?

A. No. Smoking can actually increase feelings of stress and nervousness. Break the cycle: Use drug-free strategies to calm your nerves like exercise and talking to your friends.

Q. Isn't smokeless tobacco safer to use than cigarettes?

A. No. There is no safe form of tobacco. Smokeless tobacco can cause mouth, cheek, throat, and stomach cancer. Smokeless tobacco users are 50 times more likely to get oral cancer than non-users. Those smokeless tobacco users who don't develop some type of cancer are still likely to have signs of use, like stained teeth, bad breath, and mouth sores.

Q. Isn't smoking sexy?

A. Only if you think bad breath, smelly hair, yellow fingers, and coughing are sexy. Advertisements often portray smoking as glamorous and sophisticated, but think carefully about who created these ads and why.

Info



To learn more about tobacco, or obtain referrals to programs in your community, contact:

SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information
 800-729-6686
 TDD 800-487-4889
 línea gratis en español 877-767-8432
 Web site: www.health.org

Curious about the TV ads of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign? Check out the Web site at <http://www.freevibe.com> or visit the Office of National Drug Control Policy Web site at <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>.

The bottom line: If you know someone who is using tobacco, urge him or her to quit. If you are using it--stop! The longer you ignore the real facts, the more chances you take with your health and well-being.

It's never too late. Talk to your parents, a doctor, a counselor, a teacher, or another adult you trust. Do it today!

Footnotes

1. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "Reasons for tobacco use and symptoms of nicotine withdrawal among adolescent and young adult tobacco users – United States, 1993," Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR). 43(41):745-750, October 21, 1994.
2. Ibid.
3. Mosely, J.G., and Gibbs, A.C. "Premature grey hair and hair loss among smokers: a new opportunity for health education?" British Medical Journal. 313(7072):1616, December 21, 1996.
4. Respiratory Health Effects of Passive Smoking: Lung Cancer and Other Disorders Fact Sheet. EPA, 1992.
5. CDC. "Incidence of Initiation of Cigarette Smoking--United States 1965-1996," MMWR. 47(39):837-840, October, 9 1998.
See also, Pierce, J.P., et. al., "Trends in Cigarette Smoking in the United States: Projections to the Year 2000," Journal of the American Medical Association, Vol. 261, No. 1, 1989.
6. CDC. "Projected Smoking-Related Deaths Among Youth--United States," MMWR. 45(44):971-974, November 8, 1996.
7. 1998 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 1998.
8. CDC. Oral Cancer Background Papers-Working Draft. August 7-9, 1996.