

Health Versus Tobacco

Non-smokers choose not to smoke. They know the dangers of tobacco use; they hate the smell; and they don't want to waste their money. Tobacco users know this also; some are apologetic and others are defiant because they are addicted to tobacco. Tobacco is not an illicit drug, so adults (and many children) are able to feed this habit. Tobacco is more addictive than marijuana, caffeine, alcohol, cocaine, or heroin. It isn't just the tobacco in tobacco products that make this particular addiction so dangerous. For example, there are over 4,000 chemicals in a cigarette, most of them health hazards, like Polonium-210, a radioactive, cancer-causing substance. At the present time no government agency has the power to regulate the presence of Polonium-210 or any other chemical in tobacco products. So, tobacco use continues to injure and kill.

An estimated 438,000 people die in the United States every year. Nearly one in five of those deaths are related to smoking and other tobacco use. More people die of tobacco-related illnesses than the combined numbers for HIV, illegal drug use, alcohol use, motor vehicle accidents, suicides and murders. All of those deaths are preventable simply by not using tobacco products.

Most consumers know that tobacco can harm the heart and lungs, and users will gamble on that risk. Tobacco actually affects the entire body and mind.

Eyes, Mouth, Nose, and Throat

Tobacco smoke drifts up around the eyes, irritating the moist covering of the eyes. This constant irritation is why many smokers develop cataracts and other eye problems. Tobacco is taken in through the mouth by smoking, chewing, or dipping snuff. Health issues begin here with a loss of smell and taste, salivary changes, mouth sores and plaques, and gum and tooth diseases such as inflammation, loss of bone, gum erosion, and stained, thinning tooth enamel. Some health problems are related to the kind of tobacco use: shifting, cracking, and chipping of teeth is associated with the clamping of a tobacco pipe between the teeth, or the inner lining of the mouth can develop stubborn-to-heal sores or white dry patches (most commonly found with dipping snuff or chewing tobacco). These sores and dry patches can develop into oral cancer. Cancers of the larynx and pharynx also can develop from tobacco use.

Lungs and Air Passages

90% of all deaths from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (a disease similar to asthma) are related to smoking. Most cases of lung cancer are related to the use of tobacco, especially smoking cigarettes and cigars. The risk of dying of lung cancer is about 20 times higher for smokers than nonsmokers.

Heart and Blood Vessels

Tobacco use, especially smoking, reduces circulation by narrowing and hardening blood vessels. Smokers are two to four times more likely to develop coronary heart disease than nonsmokers. Smoking also doubles a person's risk of a stroke. Smoking can cause abdominal aortic aneurysms, a serious weakening of a major blood vessel.



Health Versus Tobacco, cont.

Esophagus, Stomach, and Intestines

Nicotine and other chemicals in smoking tobacco are deposited in the mouth and down the throat. Smokeless tobacco deposits larger amounts of these along with actual tobacco in the mouth and throat. Over time, these chemicals can be swallowed along with food and saliva. This has been linked to cancers of the esophagus, stomach and colon.

The Brain

Nicotine is highly addictive and psychoactive. Nicotine stimulates the release of dopamine in the brain, causing a mild release of pleasure. There is also some evidence that reaction time and memory performance are temporarily enhanced by the stimulation of nicotine. These small positive reinforcers create a positive reward for the tobacco use behavior. In a short amount of time, the tobacco use is habit forming and eventually addictive.

The Rest of the Body

Nicotine and all the other poisons in tobacco are carried through the heart and lungs into the blood stream and eventually into body tissues. Cancers of the bladder, kidney, pancreas, and cervix have been directly linked to tobacco use. Bones are also affected; tobacco use is also linked to acute myeloid leukemia and bone density loss. Skin and hair lose moisture over time. Tobacco users are more likely to have thin dry hair and skin and premature wrinkles.

Women who smoke have increased risks of infertility. Pregnant smokers risk premature delivery or stillbirths. The baby born to a smoker is at risk for low birth weight, birth defects, infant nicotine withdrawal syndrome, and a host of other potential physical side effects.

Smoking and all other uses of tobacco harm nearly every organ in the body. Many of these conditions do not improve with medical treatment, especially if the patient continues to smoke. Even if the user escapes the illnesses or eventual death related to tobacco, overall health is generally poor.



For more information on health effects of tobacco use, please visit:
http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/Factsheets/health_effects.htm
<http://thescooponsmoking.org>
<http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/>