

Drug Facts: Smokeless Tobacco



- **Smokeless tobacco is not a safe alternative to smoking cigarettes.**
- **Smokeless tobacco contains several chemicals that can cause cancer.**
- **Even though cigarette smoking has decreased in recent years, smokeless tobacco has not.**

Smokeless tobacco is a type of tobacco that is not smoked or burned. Most types of smokeless tobacco use involve placing the product between the gum and the cheek or lip. It is also known as chewing tobacco, chew, dipping tobacco, dip, oral tobacco, spit, spitting tobacco, and snuff.

The two main types of smokeless tobacco are:

- **Chewing Tobacco:** Chewing tobacco is available in the form of loose leaves, plugs (bricks), or twists of rope. A piece of tobacco is placed between the lower lip and the cheek.
- **Snuff Tobacco:** Snuff tobacco is finely cut or powdered tobacco. It can be dry or moist, and comes in a variety of flavors. It is also available in loose leaf form or in small pouches similar to tea bags. It is placed between the cheek and gums or behind the lips.

Some tobacco companies are now selling smokeless tobacco products, such as snus, that do not require the user to spit or that dissolve when put into the mouth.

Smokeless tobacco contains nicotine, which is highly addictive. When using smokeless tobacco, nicotine is absorbed through the mouth, enters the bloodstream, and reaches the brain. Even after the tobacco is removed from the mouth, the nicotine continues to be absorbed into the bloodstream. Nicotine remains in the bloodstream longer for people who use smokeless tobacco than for those who smoke.

Health Risks of Smokeless Tobacco

Smokeless Tobacco and Cancer

Smokeless tobacco can cause cancer of the mouth, esophagus, and pancreas. Smokeless tobacco products contain several cancer-causing chemicals in varying amounts. These include:

- **Tobacco-Specific Nitrosamines (TSNAs):** These are the most harmful chemicals found in smokeless tobacco. TSNAs are organic compounds that significantly increase the risk of cancer. They form during the growing, drying, fermenting, and aging of tobacco, and their levels vary by product.
- **Polonium-210:** A radioactive element found in the fertilizer used to grow tobacco, which is then absorbed by the tobacco plant.
- **Polynuclear Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs):** Chemicals that form when tobacco is dried using heat.
- **Harmful Metals:** Such as arsenic, beryllium, cadmium, chromium, cobalt, lead, nickel, and mercury.



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800.232.4424 (phone)
www.ctclearinghouse.org

Connecticut Resources

CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

www.ct.gov/DMHAS

CT Quitline

Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW

Text 1-877-777-6534

National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

www.samhsa.gov

Smoke Free

www.smokefree.gov

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

American Lung Association

www.lung.org

Smokeless Tobacco and Oral Disease

Smokeless tobacco can cause leathery gray or white patches (leukoplakia) inside the mouth, which may lead to cancer of the mouth, throat, or voice box. The sugar in smokeless tobacco increases the risk of painful mouth sores, tooth decay, and cavities. It can also contribute to dry mouth, halitosis (bad breath), and stained teeth. Additionally, smokeless tobacco can weaken the sense of taste and cause the gums to recede, which may result in tooth loss.

Reproductive and Developmental Risks

Smokeless tobacco use during pregnancy can increase the risk of preterm delivery and stillbirth. The nicotine in smokeless tobacco products can also affect a baby's brain development before birth.

Other Risks of Smokeless Tobacco

- Smokeless tobacco can cause nicotine poisoning in children.
- Smokeless tobacco can increase the risk of death from heart disease and stroke.
- Dual use of smokeless tobacco with other tobacco products like cigarettes or e-cigarettes is concerning. Users can face greater health impacts with dual use.

Tips for Quitting Smokeless Tobacco

Quitting smokeless tobacco can be challenging, but there are strategies that can help. These include:

- **Setting a Quit Date:** Select a date within the next two weeks to stop using smokeless tobacco and use the time leading up to it to prepare.
- **Understanding Nicotine Withdrawal:** Withdrawal symptoms may include depression, insomnia, irritability, frustration, and difficulty concentrating. These symptoms often vary from person to person.
- **Managing Triggers and Cravings:** Triggers - such as specific places, activities, or people - can increase the urge to use smokeless tobacco. Identifying personal triggers allows for the development of effective coping strategies. Cravings, though intense, are temporary and will subside over time.
- **Using Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT):** NRTs can reduce withdrawal symptoms. NRTs come in a variety of different forms including gum, patches and lozenges. It is a safe and effective way to help adults who want to quit using tobacco.
- **Considering Medication:** Prescription medications, such as varenicline and bupropion, can aid in quitting smokeless tobacco. Consult a healthcare provider to determine the most suitable option.
- **Getting Support:** It is hard to quit using smokeless tobacco, but there are resources available to help with this process. Call the CT Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) for more information.

