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A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

Hookahs

Not Just Another Home Decoration

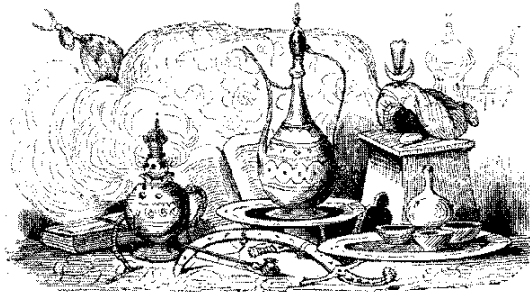
Some call it a "hookah," but it is also known as a "nargile" or "shisha." This ancient water pipe, which originated in Turkey over 500 years ago, has been the standard way of smoking flavored tobacco for centuries in restaurants and cafes throughout the Middle East. Hookahs have always been important status symbols, especially among Turks. Offering one to a guest was a sign of trust, and withholding it was taken as a serious insult.

About 5 years ago, hookahs were almost nonexistent within the United States. Recently, however, hookah smoking has gained popularity rapidly all over the world. It is especially popular amongst the new generation of smokers. Many young people are starting to think of hookah smoking as an exotic and enticing method of smoking.

What's the appeal?

Tobacco (about 30 percent) is mixed with fruit molasses and honey (about 70 percent), and smoked out of a hookah. The tobacco is a ground up mixture of dried fruit pulp and fresh tobacco leaves. The tobacco mixture comes in a variety of flavors including apple, apricot, cappuccino, cherry, grape, honey, melon, mint, orange, peach, raspberry, strawberry, and watermelon. The variety of fruity flavors is part of the appeal to teenagers. Many people prefer hookah smoking to cigarettes or cigars because of the "smooth, flavorful, and cool taste of the smoke." In fact, many nonsmokers have picked up the hookah smoking habit.

Another appeal of the hookah, especially to tourists and travelers, is the extravagant decorations on each



hookah pipe. Hookahs are seen as exotic souvenirs from a distant land, making a great living room conversation piece. To others, hookah smoking is seen as a form of

entertainment, a reason to gather with friends and family. College students find it an inexpensive and enjoyable reason to hang out with friends.

What are the health risks?

This latest teen smoking fad has health officials and the community very concerned. Any exposure to nicotine is dangerous. "I think hookahs are very dangerous," says cancer specialist Dr. Herman Kattlove, of the American Cancer Society. "Nicotine is an addictive substance. As soon as teens begin to feel good about smoking, they are going to take up cigarettes." Some teenagers develop an addiction within a few days of starting smoking.

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Most hookah smokers agree that hookah smoke does not smell like smoking regular cigarettes, which is part of the appeal of hookah use among nonsmokers, especially teenagers. Dr. Kattlove also mentions that no one knows the health effects of smoking fruit. Some marijuana smokers recognize the hookah as an ancestor to the common water bong, and some have even taken to smoking more than tobacco out of their Turkish souvenir pipes.

Is owning a hookah a Federal offense?

Hookah use may be regarded as a fine art, but possessing a cheap acrylic bong can earn a person 3 years in a Federal prison. Federal law makes it a crime to sell products mainly intended for the use of illegal drugs, including bongs, marijuana pipes, "roach" clips, miniature spoons, and scales. Those charged with selling and conspiring to sell these items face up to 3 years in prison and maximum fines of \$250,000.

Recently, Federal authorities, led by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), U.S. Marshals, Secret Service, Customs Service and Postal Inspection Service, charged 55 people who were selling illegal drug paraphernalia in both traditional stores and over the Internet. "The sale of drug paraphernalia has exploded on the Internet, making it easier for teenagers and young adults to buy it. The items often are disguised as such things as lipstick cases to escape detection and are marketed under code names and symbols," according to Attorney General John Ashcroft. The illegal drug paraphernalia marketplace has invaded the homes of families across the country, and this illegal, billion-dollar industry will no longer be ignored by law enforcement.

Information Provided By:



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
<http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/reality/articles/2003/hookah.asp>