



Smoke Signals

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Cigar and pipe smoking: Safer than cigarettes?

Most studies of smoking and tobacco use have focused on cigarette smoking. Recently, however, scientists have turned their attention to other forms of tobacco use, including cigar smoking. Smoking and tobacco use are clear causes of cancer and many other health problems — whether it's smoked in cigarettes, pipes, or cigars, chewed in smokeless tobacco, or dipped between the gums and lip in snuff.

Health risks associated with cigar smoking may be less than with cigarettes, since most cigar smokers are only “occasional” users, and most do not inhale the smoke into their lungs when puffing. Some cigar smokers do inhale, however, usually out of habit if they have previously smoked cigarettes. Unfortunately, when cigar smokers quit, they are more likely to *start* smoking cigarettes or to start again. Smoking five cigars a day, and inhaling moderately, produces the same lung cancer risk as for a pack-a-day cigarette smoker. Since cigars are much larger than cigarettes, each one packs more punch. Some large cigars contain as much tobacco (and nicotine) as an entire pack of cigarettes.

Cigar smokers place themselves at risk for:

- lung cancer
- chronic bronchitis
- emphysema
- exacerbation of asthma
- cancers of the mouth, lip, tongue, throat, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, stomach, and pancreas
- coronary heart disease, including stroke and heart attack
- vascular diseases, including aneurysm — a dilation of the wall of a blood vessel, often resulting in rupture and hemorrhage or obstruction of smaller blood vessels; 1/5 of heart disease deaths are attributable to smoking
- chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (a lung disease)
- periodontal disease, tooth erosion, tooth and supporting bone loss, stained teeth, and chronic bad breath

Nicotine is contained in all tobacco products, and is the main chemical responsible for addiction to them. It's absorbed easily through the lungs and tissues of the mouth; this occurs no matter what type of tobacco product is being used. The possibility of becoming addicted is a health risk — in terms of increased health risks with long-term use, dependency, and the financial impact of smoking.

Are Clove Cigarettes as Harmful as Regular Cigarettes?

Contrary to popular belief, clove cigarettes, also called kreteks, contain tobacco — they are made up of 60 - 70 percent tobacco and 30 - 40 percent shredded cloves (a spice). Considering their tobacco content, clove cigarettes are probably as harmful and dangerous as regular cigarettes. As a matter of fact, kreteks may hold even more risk than ordinary smokes. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), clove cigarettes produce at least twice as much nicotine, tar, and carbon monoxide as regular American cigarettes brands.

Plus, there may be an additional risk due to their clove content. The major active ingredient in cloves is eugenol, which is a topical anesthetic used in dentistry. The short- and long-term health effects of eugenol are not well known, and little inhalation toxicology research has been done on this substance. However, when smoked, eugenol numbs the throat and impairs the gag reflex. This anesthetizing effect could cause some problems; for example, liquids and/or food could more easily go down the wrong pipe. Smokers may not feel the harshness of the smoke as strongly, so they are more likely to inhale the smoke more deeply and hold it in the lungs for a longer period of time before exhaling. As a result, it's possible, or even likely, that eugenol has the potential to facilitate lung infections, respiratory illnesses, or allergic reactions in certain users, especially in smokers with existing breathing problems and/or other sensitivities.

Clove cigarettes are one of several kinds of alternative smokes. Others include bidis (tiny, inexpensive, flavored dark tobacco containing cigarettes hand rolled with a dried tendu leaf), herbal or vegetable-based cigarettes with no tobacco and nicotine, and additive-free, natural tobacco cigarettes. Often, alternative cigarette smokers are part of the under 30 crowd. People smoke the “alternatives” because they think that they are cool and/or safer, healthier, and more natural to smoke than standard smokes. Cool or not, smoking alternative cigarettes can be as harmful and even dangerous to one's health as regular ones.

Ready to stop smoking?
Call 894-2408 for more tips to
help you quit!