



Smoke Signals

Remember the Date: Nov. 17, 2005

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Nicotine Dependence

Nicotine dependence is the physical vulnerability of your body to the chemical nicotine, which is potently addicting when delivered by various tobacco products. Smoke from cigarettes, cigars and pipes contains thousands of chemicals, including nicotine.

Nicotine produces physical and mood-altering effects in your brain that are temporarily pleasing; these effects reinforce your continued use of tobacco.

Being addicted to tobacco brings you a host of health problems related to the substances in tobacco smoke. These effects include damage to your lungs, heart and blood vessels.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, approximately 24 percent of American men and 19 percent of American women smoke. The health effects of tobacco smoking are estimated to cause the deaths of more than 400,000 Americans annually.

Breaking an addiction to nicotine is difficult and takes commitment, support and time. But even if you're a longtime smoker, stopping smoking plus taking healthy lifestyle steps can reverse much of the damage smoking has done to your body.

Be a good example

If you smoke, quitting is one of the best things you can do to help keep your children off cigarettes. Only 2 percent of adolescent smokers have nonsmoking parents. By contrast, 15 percent of adolescent smokers have both a mother and a father who smoke.

If you can't stop smoking, do the next best thing:

- Don't smoke in your children's presence.
- Avoid smoking in the house or car.
- Don't offer cigarettes to your children.
- Don't leave cigarettes where your children can get to them.

Counseling children not to smoke must begin in grade school, since 25 percent of adolescents have smoked an entire cigarette before age 13. You may want to role-play with your grade-schooler, helping him or her practice what to say if offered a cigarette.

While your children may not have a strong desire to start smoking, they may lack a strong resolve to not smoke. Adolescents who lack this anti-smoking resolve are more likely to take up the deadly habit.

Smokeless tobacco: Addictive and harmful

Have you switched to smokeless tobacco to get around smoking bans in restaurants, public buildings or the workplace? Have you switched thinking you were choosing a harmless alternative to cigarettes? If you answered yes to either of these questions, you might be surprised to learn that smokeless tobacco, also called spit tobacco, has its own health risks.

How does smokeless tobacco affect your health?

Using smokeless tobacco can cause serious health problems. The most serious of these is an increased risk of oral cancer. That's because when you use smokeless tobacco, your body absorbs more than just nicotine. It absorbs 28 cancer-causing substances, including arsenic and formaldehyde. Oral cancer encompasses cancers of the mouth, throat, cheek, gums, lips and tongue. Surgery to remove the cancer from any of these areas can leave your jaw, chin, neck or face disfigured. Only 56 percent of people with mouth or throat cancer live more than five years beyond the time of diagnosis.

The use of smokeless tobacco also increases your risk of cancer of the esophagus, larynx, stomach and pancreas.

In addition, smokeless tobacco increases your risk of **gum disease**. The sugar in some smokeless tobacco may contribute to tooth decay. It can also cause your gums to pull away from your teeth in the area where you hold the tobacco in place. Your gums don't grow back. Most important, over time, you can develop advanced gum disease (peridontitis) and possibly lose teeth. Tobacco also stains your teeth.

You can quit using smokeless tobacco gradually or abruptly. But don't get discouraged if you don't succeed the first time. Stopping smokeless tobacco use can be just as difficult as stopping smoking. Most people attempt it many times before quitting for good. These suggestions can help you kick your smokeless tobacco habit.

Talk to your doctor or dentist

Make a list of all the ways you'd benefit

Select a stop date - Nov. 17 is a good day!

Get support and avoid peer pressure

Try smokeless tobacco substitutes

Don't give in to cravings

Ask your doctor about medications to help you quit