

Easy-to-Read Drug Facts

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Tobacco and Nicotine Facts



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Tobacco leaves can be shredded and smoked in cigarettes, cigars, and pipes (such as hookahs—or water pipes). They can also be ground up into a brown powder called snuff. The shredded leaves and snuff can be chewed or held in the mouth between the cheek and the gums. The snuff also can be sniffed up the nose.

You may not think of cigarettes and other forms of tobacco as drugs because they're legal to use once you're 18 or 21 years old, depending on where you live. But tobacco has a lot of chemicals that affect the body. One major chemical is called nicotine, a substance that excites the parts of the brain that make you feel good. You can get addicted to nicotine just like other drugs. And tobacco isn't healthy for you at any age.

When you use tobacco, the nicotine quickly gives you a mild rush of pleasure and energy. But it soon wears off, which makes you want to use it some more. Sometimes, the rush of energy that comes with nicotine can make you nervous and edgy.

People can also get nicotine without using tobacco. Electronic cigarettes, also called e-cigarettes, are battery-operated devices. They bring flavored nicotine to the lungs without burning tobacco. When you puff on it, the device makes vapor from the liquid in the cartridge, which is inhaled (called "vaping"). Although e-cigarettes don't create smoke, they still have nicotine and other possibly harmful chemicals. Scientists are studying how safe e-cigarettes are compared to tobacco cigarettes.

Some slang names for cigarettes are:

- Smokes
- Cancer sticks
- Coffin nails

Some slang names for chewing tobacco and snuff are:

- Chew
- Wad
- Dip

Some slang names for e-cigarettes are:

- e-Cigs
- Vapes
- Vape pipes



Signs of Tobacco/Nicotine Use and Addiction

Nicotine raises your blood pressure and heart rate. It also makes you breathe faster.

Nicotine can make you not want to eat.

People who smoke tobacco might get a cough that won't go away.

People who smoke cigarettes will usually have hair, clothes, and breath that smell like cigarettes.

People who chew tobacco tend to spit a lot.

People often sneeze when they inhale snuff.

Because tobacco's effects wear off quickly, people often crave tobacco throughout the day. When people quit, they often feel a strong need to use tobacco within a few hours.



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Effects of Tobacco and Nicotine on Brains and Bodies

These are just some of the problems tobacco and nicotine can cause:

Addiction

The nicotine in tobacco is what makes you addicted. When you smoke the effects wear off quickly. This makes you want to keep using tobacco again and again throughout the day. Most of the harm to the body is not from nicotine but from other chemicals that are in tobacco or made when burning it. The more your body and brain get addicted to the nicotine, the more tobacco you need to use to get it. It's a bad cycle.

Lung Diseases

Cigarette smoke causes lung cancer and painful breathing diseases like emphysema. These diseases can happen to people who smoke, or to others around them who breathe in their smoke.

Bad Breath, Bad Teeth, Mouth Cancer

Cigarettes and other kinds of tobacco stain teeth and cause bad breath. Chewing tobacco can make teeth fall out and lead to cancer of the mouth.

Heart and Blood Problems

If you smoke, you're more likely to have a heart attack or stroke.

Hurts Babies

If a pregnant woman uses tobacco, her baby might be born too early or too small. This can cause health problems for the baby.