



THE BASICS

Smokeless Tobacco

Do you know?

- Smokeless (spit) tobacco is made up of tobacco, sweeteners, salt and chemicals, along with nicotine, the addictive substance.
- Nicotine is a stimulant (increases energy and alertness). When tobacco users haven't had nicotine for a while, they may go into withdrawal and feel jumpy or jittery. Using tobacco may make them feel calm. This calmness occurs because the nicotine is getting rid of the withdrawal symptoms.
- Some of the chemicals found in smokeless tobacco include formaldehyde, arsenic and cyanide.
- Smokeless tobacco comes in three forms:
 - snuff: ground-up, moist tobacco usually placed between the bottom lip and gum (also called "dipping"). It comes in tins.
 - chew: shredded tobacco leaves placed between the cheek and gum and chewed (also called "a wad"). It is sold in pouches.
 - plug: shredded tobacco leaves which are pressed into a hard block. It is placed between the cheek and gum and chewed.
- When chewing, excess saliva and tobacco juice build up and must be spit out.
- 3 to 5 mgs of nicotine from smokeless tobacco is absorbed through the lining of the mouth after it has been chewed or kept in the mouth for about half an hour. This is more than a cigarette smoker gets through the lungs (0.5 to 2.0 mg), but it takes longer to be absorbed.
- A tin of snuff has about the same amount of nicotine as 60 cigarettes.
- These tobacco products are often sweetened and/or flavoured to improve the taste. Flavourings include mint, licorice and cherry.

Short-term Effects

While using, and with increasing doses, a person may experience:

- a short high, from a few moments to half an hour, followed by a period of relaxation
- increased heart rate and increased blood pressure
- increased ability to concentrate
- relief of depressed (sad) feelings
- reduced appetite (lack of desire to eat)

Can Anyone Use Tobacco?

In Canada, it is illegal to sell or supply tobacco products to any person under 18. It is also illegal for underage people to buy or possess tobacco.

Long-term Effects

After regular use over a long period of time, a person may experience:

- tiredness, muscle weakness, dizziness
- depression (feeling sad)
- mood swings and lack of energy
- cancer of the mouth (cheeks, gums, lips and tongue)
- the growth of a whitish patch of wrinkled skin (a condition known as "leukoplakia") that forms in the area where the smokeless tobacco is held. It can turn cancerous.
- throat cancer, including cancer of the voice box and the esophagus
- gum disease, which causes the gums to be inflamed. Also, the gums could recede, exposing the teeth and making it more likely that the person will have problems with their teeth.

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- tooth decay from the sweeteners added to smokeless tobacco to improve its taste
- worn down teeth caused by gritty material in the tobacco
- bad breath
- hairy tongue, a condition that occurs when the tongue's taste buds do not wear off normally because it is coated with tobacco chemicals
- high blood pressure, heart attack and stroke
- kidney disease caused by salts added to smokeless tobacco to improve its taste
- upset stomach, ulcers and stomach cancer
- loss of taste and smell

Tolerance and Dependence

- Smokers become psychologically dependent (they feel they need it) as well as physically dependent (the body needs it) on nicotine.
- Tolerance can develop with regular use, with more frequent and larger doses needed to get the same effect.
- Smokeless tobacco can be more difficult to give up than cigarettes.

Withdrawal Symptoms

- After a few hours with no nicotine, a regular smokeless tobacco user may have less energy, be a bit depressed (feel sad) and have a hard time concentrating.
- Other symptoms include nervousness, irritability and aggressiveness.
- Withdrawal symptoms can last for a few days.

Other Risks

- People who dip or chew spread their germs when they spit. This increases the risk of passing an infection to others.
- Pregnant women who use smokeless tobacco put their unborn child at risk for low birth weight, an early delivery, deformities or a stillbirth (the baby is born dead).

REMEMBER: A person's experience with any drug can vary. Here are a few of the many things that may affect the experience: the amount and strength of the drug taken, the setting, a person's mood and expectations before taking the drug, gender, overall health, past experience with that drug and whether more than one drug is being used at the same time. Using alcohol and other drugs at the same time can be dangerous.

Sources and For More Information

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Street Drugs: A Drug Identification Guide, Publishers Group, LLC, Plymouth, MN, 2005.

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For more information or for help with a drug or alcohol problem:

Contact your local Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM) office or visit the website at www.afm.mb.ca. AFM offers a broad range of prevention and rehabilitation services, including harm reduction and abstinence-based programs for alcohol, other drugs and gambling.

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