

# THE BASICS

## Tobacco

### *Do you know?*

- Nicotine is the addictive chemical found in tobacco leaves. When dried, the leaves can be used to make cigarettes, cigars, pipe tobacco, chewing tobacco and snuff, which is a powdered tobacco.
- Nicotine is most often taken by breathing in the smoke from a cigarette or other tobacco product. (See the "Smokeless Tobacco" sheet in this series for information on chewing tobacco and snuff.)
- Nicotine is a stimulant (increases energy and alertness). When smokers haven't had a cigarette for a while, they may go into withdrawal and feel jumpy or jittery. Smoking a cigarette may make them feel calm. This calmness occurs because the nicotine is getting rid of the withdrawal symptoms.
- Smokers obtain a dose of between 0.1 mg and 0.4 mg of nicotine per cigarette, even though most Canadian cigarettes contain 0.5 to 2.0 mg of nicotine.
- Tobacco contains about 4,000 other very harmful substances, such as tar, acids, glycerol, ketones and carbon monoxide.
- Second-hand smoke contains over 4,000 chemicals and gases, such as lead, arsenic, formaldehyde and carbon monoxide, and can cause cancer in non-smokers.
  - Two-thirds of the smoke from a cigarette enters the surrounding air.
  - Second-hand tobacco smoke contains nitrogen dioxide in concentrations at 50 times, and hydrogen cyanide at 160 times, recognized hazardous levels.
- 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.

### *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, faster breathing. (Smoking causes higher levels of carbon monoxide in the blood, decreasing its ability to carry oxygen, thus causing the heart to work harder.)
- increased ability to concentrate
- relief of depressed (sad) feelings
- dizziness, coughing, diarrhea and vomiting in first time or novice smokers
- reduced appetite (lack of desire to eat)

### *Good News About Quitting*

If you quit smoking, the health benefits start right away, and after 10 years a person's health is similar to someone who never smoked.

There are legal "nicotine replacement" products available without a prescription to help those who want to quit (gum, patches, nasal spray).

### *Long-term Effects*

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

- mood swings and lack of energy
- illness from various cancers. Smoking is the main cause of lung cancer and can cause cancer in many other places (colon, mouth, throat, bladder, cervix).
- chronic bronchitis and emphysema (serious lung problems affecting ability to breathe)
- heart disease and stroke, with stroke an extra risk for women on birth control pills

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- weakened immune system (the body is unable to fight off infections as easily)
- digestive system problems, such as ulcers
- problems with the healing of cuts/wounds
- death – smoking is the main preventable cause of death and disability in Canada. Over 35,000 people die each year from smoking related diseases.

## ***Tolerance and Dependence***

- Smokers can be psychologically dependent (they feel they need it) as well as physically dependent (the body needs it) on nicotine.
- People who smoke do not seem to develop a tolerance for nicotine, so they don't need more to get the same effect. However, they do need to smoke at certain intervals to keep the desired level of nicotine in their system to avoid withdrawal symptoms (see next section).
- Tolerance to certain side effects (such as dizziness and nausea) felt by first-time smokers builds up quickly.

## ***Withdrawal Symptoms***

- After a few hours with no nicotine, a regular smoker may have less energy, be a bit depressed (feel sad) and have a hard time concentrating. Other symptoms could be nervousness, irritability, headache, anger, hunger and sleeping problems.
- Smoking will make the person feel better again. However, after quitting for good, these withdrawal symptoms will go away within a few days to a few weeks.
- Cravings for a cigarette may last for weeks to months.

## ***Other Risks***

- Women smokers may reach menopause early, get cervical cancer or have problems with their menstrual periods.
- Bar and restaurant workers are twice as likely to get lung cancer from second-hand smoke than people who do not work in these places. This is one reason why many regions have made smoking in public places illegal.
- At least 1,100 non-smokers exposed to second-hand smoke will die this year in Canada.

- Pregnant mothers who smoke run a greater risk that their babies will be born sick or premature.
- Second-hand smoke is dangerous to babies, as they breathe faster than adults, taking in more pollutants from the air.
- Second-hand smoke has been linked to SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), which kills 100 babies every year.
- Second-hand smoke is a cause of asthma attacks, ear infections, bronchitis and coughs in children.
- Children's exposure to second-hand smoke may contribute to heart disease in adulthood.

**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.

*Tobacco* (brochure), Addiction Research Foundation, Toronto, 1991.

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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](http://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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