

Smokeless Tobacco

What is smokeless tobacco?

Smokeless tobacco includes chewing tobacco, snuff, quid, chew, plug, or spit tobacco. Chewing tobacco is leaf tobacco that is put inside the cheek. Snuff is finely ground and is put between the cheeks and gums, or may be sniffed through the nose. Smokeless tobacco is sometimes called spit or spitting tobacco because the user of this type of tobacco spits out the tobacco juices and saliva that builds up in the mouth.

Is it safe?

Smokeless tobacco is far from safe. The risk of cancer of the mouth, cheeks, or gums is 50 times greater for smokeless tobacco users when compared with people who do not use tobacco. This cancer can start in tobacco chewers of any age and often affects young people. This type of cancer is hard to cure and spreads very fast. Some people may think that if they use snuff or chewing tobacco for just a short time and then quit, they will be safe from cancer. This is not true. Cancer can start within six to seven years. Permanent changes happen in the mouth that do not go back to normal when smokeless tobacco use is stopped. No amount of flossing or brushing can keep these changes from happening.

Smokeless tobacco contains 28 cancer-causing substances such as nicotine, Polonium 210, which is nuclear waste, and formaldehyde, an embalming fluid. Three to four times more nicotine is absorbed from smokeless tobacco than from cigarettes, and it stays in the blood longer. Smokeless tobacco is very addictive. Users need more tobacco and strong tobacco over time to get the same effects.

Some people who use smokeless tobacco may think it will help them do better in sports. This is not true. Smokeless tobacco causes your heart to beat faster and your blood pressure to go up. This puts strain on the heart and has a bad effect on performance. Smokeless tobacco can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Smokeless tobacco is not safer than smoking cigarettes. Young smokeless tobacco users are actually more likely to start smoking cigarettes.

What are the signs of addiction?

Signs that a person is addicted to smokeless tobacco include:

- No longer feeling sick or dizzy when using it as you did when you first started using it
- Dipping more often in different settings
- Switching to stronger tobacco, with more nicotine
- Swallowing the juice on a regular basis
- Sleeping with a dip or chew in the mouth
- Needing a dip or chew first thing in the morning
- Being unable to go more than a few hours without dipping or chewing
- Having very strong cravings when trying to go without a dip or chew

How can I quit?

It is very hard to quit smokeless tobacco, but it can be done. The best way to quit is to have a quit date and quitting plan. A person trying to quit must focus on all the reasons they do not like dipping and chewing.

Make a list of your “triggers”, the situations, places, or emotions that make you more likely to chew or dip. Being aware of these triggers can help you avoid them or at least be ready for them.

Set up a support system. This could be a group class, Nicotine Anonymous, a friend, or a family member who has quit and is willing to help you.

Nicotine gum or patches may help when trying to quit, especially for someone who is a heavy user. It may help to use non-tobacco mint leaf snuff, sugarless gum, hard candy, beef jerky, or sunflower seeds in place of the smokeless tobacco. No matter how hard it is to quit using smokeless tobacco, cigarette smoking should never be used as a replacement.

See a healthcare provider or dentist for information and help in quitting smokeless tobacco. The National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research has a guide for quitting on their Web site at <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov>.

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