

The Truth About Tobacco

Each day, millions of Americans spend time ingesting a cocktail of chemicals that cause irreversible damage to their heart, lungs, air passages, and brain. Many of these people are teenagers. Over 17 percent of high school students are “current” cigarette smokers. Some teens smoke because they think it makes them look cool, or because they want to “fit in” with their peers. Regardless of how they start smoking, they continue simply because they **can’t quit**. The addictive drugs that are present in cigarettes, chews, and other forms of tobacco practically force a person to keep lighting up, even when he knows that he is opening the door to a wide range of different diseases.

But the damage tobacco inflicts on the user isn’t the only danger. A recent survey shows that 47% of young people who smoke also use illicit drugs as compared with 5% for non-smokers.

Cigarettes

Each cigarette is like a small chemical factory, releasing over 4,000 chemicals into a person’s lungs and into the air. One such chemical is nicotine, which has been proven more addictive than heroin.

The long-term effects of smoking include lung cancer, heart disease, strokes, emphysema, asthma, wrinkling, yellow fingers, and stained teeth. The short-term effects include coughing, increased heart rate, increased stomach acid, slowed brain activity, kidney stress, and bad breath.

Smokeless Tobacco

Many kids think smokeless tobacco is a safe alternative to smoking, but it is actually more dangerous. One pinch of smokeless tobacco contains the same amount of nicotine as five cigarettes—enough to addict a young person on the first try.

The long-term effects of smokeless tobacco include high blood pressure, oral cancer, gum disease, and stained, loose and rotted teeth. The short-term effects include slowed brain activity, increased stomach acid, increased heart rate, kidney stress, and bad breath.

Children At Highest Risk For Tobacco:

- have parents, siblings, or friends who smoke
- try to act “tough” or “grown up”
- deny the harmful effects of tobacco
- have fewer coping skills and smoke to alleviate stress
- have poor self-esteem and suffer from depression
- have poor academic performance (especially true for girls)
- are very influenced by advertisements that relate cigarette smoking to being thin and/or suffer from eating disorders



RESOURCES

Parents - The Antidrug:

www.theantidrug.com

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids:

www.tobaccofreekids.org

National Institute on Drug Abuse
Parenting Resources:

www.drugabuse.gov/parents

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

www.cdc.gov/tobacco

>INFOCUS

10 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO KEEP YOUR CHILD TOBACCO FREE



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1. Realize That You Are the Greatest Influence in Your Children's Lives

Despite the influence of television, the Internet, and movies, you are the greatest influence on your children. Talk to your children directly about the risks of tobacco use. If your friends or relatives have become ill from tobacco use, let your children know.

2. Take a Stand in Your Home—Early and Often

Start speaking with your child about tobacco early—at the age of 5 or 6—and continue through the high school years. Many kids start using tobacco by age 11, and many are addicted by age 14. Kids are less likely to use tobacco if they can talk openly to their parents about their friends' tobacco use, peer pressure, and their own issues and concerns about tobacco.

3. Be a Good Role Model—Don't Use Tobacco

Statistics show that children of tobacco users are twice as likely to use tobacco themselves. If you use tobacco, try to quit. Meanwhile, do not use

tobacco in your children's presence. Don't offer it to them, and don't leave it where they can easily get to it.

4. Empower Your Children to Deal with Peer Pressure

Studies show that children with high self-esteem are less likely to be influenced by peer pressure. Encourage your children to believe in themselves and to resist pressure from peers. Talk about situations in which your child will have to stand up to others and "refuse to use" tobacco and other drugs.

5. Get Your Child Involved in Academics, Sports, and Extracurricular Activities

There is overwhelming scientific evidence that students who are involved in academics, sports, and extracurricular activities are less likely to use tobacco and other drugs. By engaging in these activities, students gain confidence and meet other youths who share their interests.

6. Learn About Tobacco Prevention Programs at Your Child's School

Talk with school administrators about adopting a school-wide anti-tobacco education program. Insist that students and school employees remain tobacco-free on school grounds.

7. Discuss Tobacco's Image

Smoking is made to look glamorous in the movies and on TV. Although Big Tobacco has been severely restricted in advertising their products, they still have to find a way to recruit 5,000 new young smokers a day. Talk to your children about the way tobacco products are advertised. Help your child "read between the lines" and figure out the false messages the tobacco industry is trying to send them.

8. Discuss the Money Issue

Discuss with your child the money that tobacco addicts spend per day, week, and year to buy tobacco products. Remind your child that the cost of smoking or chewing tobacco is great—to a person's health and to his or her wallet.

9. Point Out the Harmful Effects of Smoking to One's Health and Looks

Make sure your child knows the devastating effects of tobacco on a person's health. Also, remind your child that tobacco causes a person to look and smell bad (for example, yellow teeth, bad breath, rotted teeth, wrinkles, etc.).



10. If Your Child is Smoking Help Him or Her Quit

Studies show that friends and family can have a big impact on a smoker's success at quitting. You cannot make your child stop using tobacco. You can explain your concern, show you care, and say you will help them try to quit. Ask your child what you could do that would be most helpful. Be non-confrontational, supportive, and respectful. Understand the withdrawal symptoms: headaches, sleeping difficulties, fatigue, grouching, and difficulty concentrating. Remind your child that these are signs of recovery and that they will not last.



You should never make smoking easy for your child. Do not purchase tobacco for your child. Limit their ability to buy cigarettes—if necessary, by limiting sources of income so they can't buy tobacco. Get the help and support you and your child need. Enlist the help of your pediatrician, as well as health organizations, school counselors, and online support. Help your child form a community that will support a tobacco-free lifestyle.

Almost 80% of all smokers started smoking before age 18. Don't wait! Talk to your children about the dangerous consequences of tobacco early and often.