

Smokeless Tobacco

Smokeless tobacco products contain tobacco but are not burned. They come in different forms, and contain many of the same harmful chemicals as cigarettes. These products are not considered safe. This fact sheet describes various smokeless tobacco products and health risks seen with their use. If you use smokeless tobacco contact your healthcare provider for a plan to stop.



What are the types of smokeless tobacco?

- **Oral (moist) snuff** is a finely cut, processed tobacco, which the user places between the cheek and gum that releases nicotine which, in turn, is absorbed by the membranes of the mouth.
- **Snus (or pouches)** is a tea-bag like packet of moist snuff tobacco and flavorings, placed between the upper gum and lip. The product design does not require the user to spit, unlike traditional moist snuff.
- **Dissolvable tobacco** products are made of ground tobacco and flavorings, shaped into pellets, strips, or other forms, that the user ingests orally. These products do not require spitting.
- **Looseleaf chewing tobacco** is stripped and processed cigar-type tobacco leaves, loosely packed to form small strips. It is often sold in a foil-lined pouch and usually treated with sugar or licorice.
- **Plug chewing tobacco** consists of small, oblong blocks of semi-soft chewing tobacco that often contain sweeteners and other flavoring agents.
- **Nasal snuff** is a fine tobacco powder that is sniffed into the nostrils. Flavorings may be added during fermentation, and perfumes may be added after grinding.

Are smokeless tobacco products safe?

No, these products are not a safe alternative to cigarettes or other tobacco products. These products all contain tobacco, which means they have many of the same harmful toxic and carcinogenic (cancer causing) chemicals found in cigarettes.

Is smokeless tobacco addictive?

People who use these products often smoke cigarettes too. You can have problems with nicotine addiction from using these products just like with cigarettes. Higher levels of nicotine in many smokeless tobacco products can make the addiction more severe, so stopping use can be much harder. In fact, there is evidence that the tobacco industry has changed nicotine delivery to make their smokeless products more addictive. For more information about nicotine dependence and help in stopping use see the ATS Patient Information Series at www.thoracic.org/patients.

Many of the products have sweet, mint, fruit, or candy flavors, which make them more appealing to young people. Much of the marketing for many of these products appears to be designed to target young people. The sweet flavors and candy like packaging can attract curious young children.

Smokeless Tobacco and Risks to Oral Health

Smokeless tobacco leads to more dental cavities (tooth decay), gum disease and tooth loss. Many smokeless tobacco users can have sores in the mouth, especially where they hold the product in the cheek. Smokeless tobacco causes cancer of the mouth and throat, as well as esophagus (food pipe) and pancreas. Mouth cancer can start with white patches (leukoplakia) on the tongue, cheeks or gums.

Smokeless Tobacco and the Increased Risk for Infection

Smokeless tobacco raises your chances of getting pneumonia (lung infection). These products may contain bacteria that cause these infections. People who use smokeless tobacco often keep the products in their mouth for long periods of time so the bacteria in these products is more likely to pass into the user's mouth.

Some Additional Health Risks

Just like cigarettes, smokeless tobacco can increase your risk of developing heart disease or having a stroke. Pregnant women who use smokeless tobacco may have more complications while delivering their babies, such as premature delivery and stillbirth. Their babies also may have more problems with brain and lung development.

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Rx Action Steps

- ✓ Smokeless tobacco such as spit and spit-less tobacco products are very hazardous to your health. Do not start using these products.
- ✓ If you do use them, make a plan to stop. Check websites below for self-help tips. Seek out a local smoking cessation program as often they help with smokeless tobacco too.
- ✓ Call 1-800-QUITNOW (1-800-784-8669) for telephone counseling and information about help for stopping the use of tobacco products in your state.
- ✓ Smokeless tobacco is highly addictive. Talk to your healthcare provider and get treatment for nicotine and tobacco dependence.
- ✓ Talk to your children about the importance of being tobacco and nicotine free. Start from a young age – as soon as they can understand the concepts. Set an example for your children by being or becoming tobacco free.

Healthcare Provider's Contact Number:

Resources

American Thoracic Society

- www.thoracic.org/patients

American Cancer Society

- <https://www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking.html>

US Centers For Disease Control

- https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/factsheets/smokeless/use_us/index.htm

Tobacco Free Kids

- <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0003.pdf>

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