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Health Risks of Smokeless Tobacco

- [Types of smokeless tobacco](#)

No form of smokeless tobacco is a safe substitute for cigarettes. Still, tobacco companies often market these products as alternatives to smoking in places where smoking isn't allowed.

Smokeless tobacco causes cancer

Overall, people who dip or chew get about the same amount of nicotine as people who smoke regularly. They are also exposed to more than 25 chemicals that are known to cause cancer. The most harmful cancer-causing substances in smokeless tobacco are *tobacco-specific nitrosamines* (TSNAs). TSNA levels vary by product, but the higher the level the greater the cancer risk.

Cancers linked to the use of smokeless tobacco include:

- [Mouth, tongue, cheek, and gum cancer](#)³
- [Cancer of the esophagus](#)⁴ (the tube that connects the throat to the stomach)
- [Pancreatic cancer](#)⁵

The risk of cancer with newer types of smokeless tobacco products isn't quite as clear, mainly because they haven't been studied as well as chewing tobacco and snuff. They still contain potentially harmful chemicals that might increase a person's risk of cancer, although the amounts can vary by product.

Smokeless tobacco causes other health problems

Mouth and tooth problems

Many studies have shown high rates of **leukoplakia** in the mouth where users place their chew or dip. Leukoplakia is a gray-white patch in the mouth that can become cancer. These patches can't be scraped off. They're sometimes called sores but are usually painless. The longer a person uses oral tobacco, the more likely they are to have leukoplakia. Stopping tobacco might help clear up the spot, but treatment may be needed if there are signs of early cancer.

Tobacco stains teeth and causes bad breath. It can also irritate or destroy gum tissue. Many regular smokeless tobacco users have receding or swollen gums, tooth decay and cavities (from the high sugar content in the tobacco), scratching and wearing down (abrasion) of teeth, and bone loss around the teeth. The surface of the tooth root may be exposed where gums have shrunk. All of these can cause teeth to loosen and fall out.

Other health problems

Other harmful health effects of smokeless tobacco include:

- Increased risk of dying from heart disease and stroke
- Increased risk of early delivery and stillbirth when used during pregnancy

Smokeless tobacco can lead to nicotine poisoning and even death in children who mistake it for candy.

All smokeless tobacco contains nicotine, which can lead to addiction. In teens, using

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/carcinogens-found-in-tobacco-products.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/e-cigarettes-vaping/what-do-we-know-about-e-cigarettes.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/esophagus-cancer.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/pancreatic-cancer.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking/nicotine-replacement-therapy.html
7. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking/prescription-drugs-to-help-you-quit-smoking.html
8. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking.html

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