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Is Any Type of Tobacco Product Safe?

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There is no safe form of tobacco. Staying tobacco free is the best way to protect your health.

Tobacco hurts and kills people. In fact, smoking causes about 1 out of every 5 deaths in the United States.

There are many forms of tobacco on the market, and people often think some forms are safe and don't cause health problems. This isn't true.

Other tobacco products, like e-cigarettes, hookahs, edibles, heat-not-burn cigarettes, and smokeless tobacco, contain some of the same chemicals as regular combustible cigarettes. It's important to know that even though e-cigarettes do not contain tobacco, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) classifies them as "tobacco products."

Regular (combustible) cigarettes

Regular cigarettes, called *combustible cigarettes*, contain tobacco, added chemicals, a filter, and a paper covering. People who smoke them expose themselves to [over 7,000 chemicals](#)¹ when they inhale the smoke from their cigarettes. People around them are

also exposed to the same chemicals through secondhand smoke.

Cigarette smoking accounts for almost all tobacco-related illnesses and deaths in the United States.

Light, hand-rolled, natural, or herbal cigarettes

Some people believe that “light” and “low-tar” cigarettes have lower health risks. But studies have shown that the [risk of serious health effects](#)² is not lower in light or low-tar cigarettes. Because of this, the FDA has banned use of the terms “light,” “mild,” and “low” in any cigarette sales unless the FDA specifically allows it and so far, it hasn’t.

Hand-rolled cigarettes are no safer than commercial brands. In fact, people who have always smoked hand-rolled cigarettes have a higher risk of cancers of the larynx (voice box), esophagus (swallowing tube), mouth, and pharynx (throat) when compared with people who smoke machine-made cigarettes.

Some cigarettes are now being sold as “all natural.” They’re marketed as having no chemicals or additives and rolled with 100% cotton filters. There’s no proof they are healthier or safer than other cigarettes, nor is there good reason to think they would be. Smoke from all cigarettes, natural or otherwise, has many chemicals that can cause cancer (carcinogens) and toxins that come from burning the tobacco itself, including tar and carbon monoxide.

Even herbal cigarettes with no tobacco give off tar, particulates, and carbon monoxide and are dangerous to your health.

Menthol cigarettes

Menthol cigarettes are not safer than unflavored cigarettes. In fact, they could be even more dangerous.

Menthol cigarettes tend to be “easier” to smoke – the added menthol produces a cooling sensation in the throat when the smoke is inhaled. It lessens the cough reflex and covers the dry feeling in the throat that people who smoke often have. People who smoke menthol cigarettes can inhale deeper and hold the smoke in longer. This helps to explain why people who smoke menthol cigarettes and get lung cancer often have their cancers located in certain parts of the lung. It also might be a reason why it is harder for people who smoke menthol cigarettes to quit.

The specific dangers of menthol cigarettes are an active area of research, but they are

at least as dangerous as unflavored cigarettes. It's important to note the tobacco industry often targets African Americans for the sale of menthol cigarettes.

Cigars and little cigars

Many people view cigar smoking as more sophisticated and less dangerous than cigarette smoking. Yet one large cigar can contain as much tobacco as an entire pack of cigarettes.

Most cigars are made of a single type of aged, air-cured or dried tobacco that's fermented in a multi-step process. The fermentation causes chemical and bacterial reactions that change the tobacco. This is what gives cigars a different taste and smell from cigarettes. Cigars come in many sizes:

The smallest, known as *little cigars* or *small cigars*, are about the size of cigarettes. Other than the fact that they are brown and maybe a little longer, they look like cigarettes. They come in flavors like mint, chocolate, or fruit, and many have filters. They're often sold in packs of 20. Most people smoke these small cigars exactly the

Many popular brands of larger cigars have between 100 and 200 mg, or even as many as 444 mg of nicotine.

No matter the size, cigars are tobacco, and the smoke from them contains the same cancer-causing substances found in cigarette smoke. All cigars are dangerous to your health.

People who smoke regular cigars are 4 to 10 times more likely to die from cancers of the mouth, throat, larynx, and esophagus than people who don't smoke cigars. For those who inhale, cigar smoking appears to be linked to death from cancer of the pancreas and bladder, too.

Smoking more cigars each day or inhaling cigar smoke leads to more exposure and higher health risks. The health risks linked to occasional cigar smoking (less than daily) are less clear. Like cigarettes, cigars give off [secondhand smoke](#)³, which is also dangerous.

products. Read more in [What Do We Know About E-cigarettes?](#)⁴

Clove cigarettes (kreteks)

Clove cigarettes, also called kreteks (KREE-teks), are a tobacco product with the same health risks as cigarettes. Kreteks are imported from Indonesia. They contain tobacco, ground cloves, clove oil, and other additives.

Like other flavored cigarettes, kreteks are used mostly by younger people. They are nearly ideal in design as a “trainer cigarette” – giving kids another way to try tobacco and get addicted to nicotine. The false image of these products as clean, natural, and safer than regular cigarettes seems to attract some young people who might otherwise not start smoking. But they are not safer than cigarettes, and researchers are looking into whether the cloves might even cause additional problems.

Kreteks have been linked to lung problems, such as lower oxygen levels, fluid in the lungs, and inflammation. People who smoke regular kreteks have up to 20 times the risk for abnormal lung function (blocked airways or poor oxygen uptake) compared with people who don't smoke.

Bidis (flavored cigarettes)

Bidis or “beedies” are thin, flavored cigarettes that originated in India and other Southeast Asian countries. They are hand-rolled in an unprocessed tobacco, tendu, or temburi leaf (plants native to Asia) and may be tied with colorful strings on the ends. They tend to cost less than regular cigarettes and they give the person using them a quick buzz from the high levels of nicotine.

Even though bidis have less tobacco than regular cigarettes, they deliver 3 to 5 times more nicotine than regular cigarettes, as well as other harmful substances, such as tar and carbon monoxide. They are unfiltered. And because they are thinner than regular cigarettes, they require about 3 times as many puffs per cigarette.

Some people think they are safer and more natural than regular cigarettes. But bidis appear to have all of the same health risks of regular cigarettes, including many types of cancer. People who smoke bidis have much higher risks of heart attacks, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and cancer than those who don't smoke bidis.

Hookahs (water pipes)

- [risks-of-smoking-tobacco.html](#)
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/health-risks-of-tobacco/secondhand-smoke.html
 4. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/e-cigarettes-vaping/what-do-we-know-about-e-cigarettes.html
 5. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/health-risks-of-tobacco/secondhand-smoke.html

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Written by

The American Cancer Society medical and editorial content team
(<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/acs-medical-content-and-news-staff.html>)

Our team is made up of doctors and oncology certified nurses with deep knowledge of cancer care as well as journalists, editors, and translators with extensive experience in medical writing.

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