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Why People Start Smoking and Why It's Hard to Stop

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Anyone who starts using tobacco can become addicted to nicotine. Studies show that smoking is most likely to become a habit during the teen years. The younger you are when you begin to smoke, the more likely you are to become addicted to nicotine.

According to the 2014 Surgeon General's Report (SGR), nearly 9 out of 10 adults who smoke started before age 18, and nearly all started by age 26. The report estimates that about 3 out of 4 high school students who smoke will become adults who smoke – even if they intend to quit in a few years.

Is smoking tobacco really addictive?

Addiction is marked by the repeated, compulsive seeking or use of a substance despite its harmful effects and unwanted consequences. Addiction is mental or emotional dependence on a substance. Nicotine is the known addictive substance in tobacco. Regular use of tobacco products leads to addiction in many users. Nicotine is a drug

keep the level of nicotine within a comfortable range.

- People who smoke can quickly become dependent on nicotine and suffer physical and emotional (mental or psychological) withdrawal symptoms when they stop smoking. These symptoms include irritability, nervousness, headaches, and trouble sleeping. The true mark of addiction, though, is that people still smoke even though they know smoking is bad for them – affecting their lives, their health, and their families in unhealthy ways. In fact, most people who smoke want to quit.

Researchers are also looking at other chemicals in tobacco that make it hard to quit. In the brains of animals, tobacco smoke causes chemical changes that are not fully explained by the effects of nicotine.

The average amount of nicotine in one regular cigarette is about 1 to 2 milligrams (mg). The amount you actually take in depends on how you smoke, how many puffs you take, how deeply you inhale, and other factors.

How powerful is nicotine addiction?

About 2 out of 3 of people who smoke say they want to quit and about half try to quit each year, but few succeed without help. This is because they not only become physically dependent on nicotine. There's also a strong emotional (psychological) dependence. Nicotine affects behavior, mood, and emotions. If a person uses tobacco to help manage unpleasant feelings and emotions, it can become a problem for some when they try to quit. Someone who smokes may link smoking with social activities and many other activities, too. All of these factors make smoking a hard habit to break.

In fact, it may be harder to quit smoking than to stop using cocaine or opiates like heroin. In 2012, researchers reviewed 28 different studies of people who were trying to quit using the substance they were addicted to. They found that about 18% were able to quit drinking, and more than 40% were able to quit opiates or cocaine, but only 8% were able to quit smoking.

What about nicotine in other tobacco products?

Nicotine in cigars

People who inhale cigar smoke absorb nicotine through their lungs as quickly as people who smoke cigarettes. For those who don't inhale, the nicotine is absorbed more slowly through the lining of the mouth. This means people who smoke cigars can get the desired dose of nicotine without inhaling the smoke directly into their lungs.

Most full-size cigars have as much nicotine as several cigarettes. Cigarettes contain an average of about 8 milligrams (mg) of nicotine, but only deliver about 1 to 2 mg of nicotine. Many popular brands of larger cigars have between 100 and 200 mg, or even as many as 444 mg of nicotine. The amount of nicotine a cigar delivers to a person who smokes can vary a great deal, even among people smoking the same type of cigar. How much nicotine is taken in depends on things like:

- How long the person smokes the cigar
- How many puffs are taken
- Whether the smoke is inhaled

Given these factors and the large range of cigar sizes, it's almost impossible to make good estimates of the amounts of nicotine larger cigars deliver.

Small cigars that are the size and shape of cigarettes have about the same amount of nicotine as a cigarette. If these are smoked like cigarettes (inhaled), they would be expected to deliver a similar amount of nicotine – 1 to 2 mg.

Nicotine in smokeless tobacco

Smokeless tobacco delivers a high dose of nicotine. Nicotine enters the bloodstream from the mouth or nose and is carried to every part of your body.

Nicotine in smokeless tobacco is measured in milligrams (mg) of nicotine per gram (g) of tobacco. It's been found to vary greatly, for instance as much as 4 to 25 mg/g for moist snuff, 11 to 25 mg/g for dry snuff, and 3 to 40 mg/g for chew tobacco. Other factors that affect the amount of nicotine a person gets include things like:

- Brand of tobacco
- Product pH level (how acidic it is)
- Amount chewed
- Cut of tobacco

Still, blood levels of nicotine have been shown to be much the same when comparing people who smoke cigarettes to those who use smokeless tobacco.

Nicotine in non-combusted products

Non-combusted tobacco products come in various forms and are used in different ways. Non-combusted products contain nicotine and can lead to nicotine addiction.

- Trouble sleeping, including trouble falling asleep and staying asleep, and having bad dreams or even nightmares
- Trouble concentrating
- Restlessness or boredom
- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Increased appetite
- Weight gain
- Slower heart rate
- Constipation and gas
- Cough, dry mouth, sore throat, and nasal drip
- Chest tightness

These symptoms can lead a person to start using tobacco again to boost blood levels of nicotine and stop symptoms.

Hyperlinks

1. smokingcessationleadership.ucsf.edu/

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