



## Myths about Tobacco Use

### **Myth: Tobacco is not a drug.**

**Fact:** The nicotine found in tobacco products is a very addictive drug. Addiction to nicotine has been compared to having an addiction to drugs like cocaine or heroin. Exposure to nicotine alters brain chemistry resulting in tobacco dependence and nicotine addiction.

### **Myth: Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) is as harmful as smoking or chewing tobacco.**

**Fact:** NRT (patch, gum, lozenge, inhaler, and nasal spray) is always much safer than using tobacco.

NRT replaces some of the nicotine your body receives from tobacco products, but at a much lower level. Nicotine from NRT has few side-effects. Most of the harm from smoking is from the tar and carbon monoxide which are not found in nicotine replacement products. Nicotine from NRT is delivered much more slowly and at lower levels than from smoking. As a result, the risk of becoming addicted to NRT is very small. In any case, long term use of NRT carries very little risk and is much safer than continuing to smoke or chew.

### **Myth: It's safer to smoke light or low-tar cigarettes.**

**Fact:** There is no such thing as a safe cigarette! Cigarette smoke contains 7,000 chemicals of which at least 250 are toxic and at least 69 are known to cause cancer. People who smoke light cigarettes often smoke more and have to inhale deeper to get the same amount of nicotine. When smoking these cigarettes, you end up taking in more carbon monoxide and tar.

### **Myth: It doesn't matter whether you quit or not, the damage is already done.**

**Fact:** When a person quits smoking/dipping the body immediately starts repairing itself:

- Blood pressure and pulse rates go back to normal range after 20 minutes of not using tobacco.
- After 12 hours without a cigarette, the body cleanses itself of the excess carbon monoxide from the cigarettes. The carbon monoxide level returns to normal, increasing the body's oxygen levels.
- Nerve endings start growing back and lung function improves after one week of not smoking.
- After 10 – 15 years of not smoking, risks of all tobacco related diseases are greatly reduced.
- One year after quitting smoking, a person's risk for coronary heart disease decreases by half.

### **Myth: Smoking is relaxing.**

**Fact:** Smoking actually increases your heart rate and blood pressure. It seems relaxing but smoking only relieves the tension that is caused by your need for nicotine. Once you quit smoking you can learn new ways to help relieve tension and stress that are good for your health.

### **Myth: Smokers with mental health conditions can't quit smoking.**

**Fact:** While additional challenges may exist for people with mental health conditions, they can quit with the right support and treatment. Many people with mental health conditions may have other life challenges that make it harder to quit smoking. These may include: more friends who smoke, fewer resources available and stronger dependence on cigarettes. Research shows that health care providers who treat patients with mental health conditions do not talk about or treat smoking as often as other health care providers.

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**Myth: Quitting smoking can make mental health condition symptoms worse.**

Fact: For people who experience depression, anxiety or stress, quitting smoking can make them feel better! Studies even show that quitting smoking does not make symptoms any worse for people with schizophrenia. Smokers who are trying to quit might feel irritable or restless, have trouble sleeping or concentrating, or feel anxious, depressed or hungry. In most cases, these are symptoms of nicotine withdrawal, and not mental health conditions getting worse. These feelings usually go away in a few days.

**Myth: I smoked during my last pregnancy and had a healthy baby, so this baby will be healthy too.**

Fact: Every time you smoke during pregnancy, you put your baby's health at risk. Continuing to smoke during pregnancy harms your baby and can cause low-birth weight, preterm delivery, and infant death. The effects of smoking during pregnancy can cause your baby to have more colds, lung problems, learning disabilities, and physical growth problems. If you smoked and had a healthy pregnancy in the past, that does not mean your next one will be healthy, too.

**Myth: Quitting smoking will be too stressful on my baby.**

Fact: Quitting smoking does not put extra stress on your baby. Quitting smoking is one of the best things that you can do for your health and your baby's health during development in the womb and after it is born. By quitting smoking, you will be protecting your infant from the dangers of secondhand smoke and reducing the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

**Myth: Smokeless tobacco is healthier than cigarettes.**

Fact: Smokeless tobacco is still tobacco, which provides nicotine along with other substances that are known to cause cancer. While you are not inhaling it into your lungs, it is still being absorbed through the lining of your mouth and circulating through your bloodstream to all parts of your body. Use of smokeless tobacco has been linked to oral cancer, esophageal cancer, and pancreatic cancer. It can also cause heart disease, gum disease, and oral lesions known as leukoplakia. Although there is no second-hand smoke to endanger people around you, spitting the excessive saliva produced from smokeless tobacco can be offensive to others.

**Myth: Cutting back is good enough for my health.**

Fact: Studies have shown that smokers who have cut back on cigarettes draw more deeply and smoke more of each cigarette. The end result is that they can get the same amount of toxic smoke as before. So, your health risks wouldn't begin to decrease until you quit smoking.

**Myth: Quitting would make me gain weight, which would be just as unhealthy as cigarette smoking.**

False: It is true some people gain weight when quitting cigarettes in part because their appetite is no longer suppressed. It may also be that some people are eating more frequently to keep their hands and mouth busy, replacing the behavior of smoking. Either way, most people gain about 10 to 15 pounds on average—an amount that does not raise health risks nearly as much as smoking cigarettes does. Even if you gain weight when you stop smoking, quitting is still the best behavior modification you can make to lower your heart health risk.

Adapted from the following sources: Truth Initiative, American Lung Association, CDC, American Journal of Public Health, American Lung Association, American Pregnancy Association, and National Cancer Institute.

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