

# Tips for Teens: Tobacco: The Truth About Tobacco

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Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration  
1 Choke Cherry Road • Rockville, MD 20857 • 1-877-SAMHSA-7



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

# Tips for Teens: Tobacco

## *The Truth About Tobacco*

### The Truth About Tobacco

Slang—Cigarettes: Smokes, Cigs, Butts. Smokeless Tobacco: Chew, Dip, Spit Tobacco, Snuff

#### Get the Facts...

**Tobacco—cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, and snuff—damages your health.** Smoking, which is the most common cause of lung cancer, is also a leading cause of cancer of the mouth, throat, bladder, pancreas, and kidneys. Over 13 percent—3.3 million—youths aged 12 to 17 used a tobacco product in the past month.<sup>1</sup> Smokeless tobacco contains 28 ingredients that can cause cancer in your lips, tongue, cheeks, gums, and the top and bottom of your mouth.<sup>2</sup>

**Tobacco affects your body's development.** Smoking is particularly harmful for teens because your body is still growing and changing. The 200 known poisons in cigarette smoke affect your normal development and can cause life-threatening diseases, such as chronic bronchitis, heart disease, and stroke.

**Tobacco is addictive.** Cigarettes contain nicotine—a powerfully addictive substance. The younger a person starts smoking, the more likely he is to become strongly addicted to nicotine.<sup>3</sup> Even though it is rare, addiction can occur after smoking as few as 100 cigarettes.<sup>4</sup> Of the adult tobacco users, more than 80 percent report using tobacco regularly before age 18.<sup>5</sup>

**Tobacco can kill you.** Each year in the United States, cigarette smoking accounts for 440,000 deaths.<sup>6</sup> More deaths are caused each year by tobacco than by all deaths from HIV, illegal drug use, alcohol use, motor vehicle injuries, suicides, and murder combined.<sup>7</sup>

#### Before You Risk It...

**Know the law.** It is illegal for anyone under 18 to buy cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, or tobacco-related products.

**Stay informed.** Addiction to tobacco is hard to control. Young people often underestimate the addictiveness of tobacco and the effect of tobacco use on their health. Studies indicate that most teenage and young adult smokers want to quit and try to do so, but few succeed.<sup>8</sup>

**Keep your edge.** The poisons in cigarettes can affect your appearance. Tobacco stains teeth and nails and, also, dulls skin and hair.<sup>9</sup> There's more! Research confirms smoking causes skin to age prematurely—*wrinkles*—and also links smoking and hair loss—*baldness*.<sup>10</sup>

**Be aware.** It can be hard to play sports if you use tobacco. Smoking causes shortness of breath and dizziness, and chewing tobacco causes dehydration.

**Think of others.** Anyone who smokes puts the health of friends and family at risk—more than 126 million nonsmoking Americans are exposed to secondhand smoke in homes, vehicles, workplaces, and public places. Every year, about 3,000 nonsmokers die from lung cancer due to secondhand smoke.<sup>11</sup> There is no risk free level of secondhand smoke exposure; even brief exposures can be dangerous.<sup>12</sup>

**Get the facts.** Each day, nearly 4,400 young people between the ages of 12 and 17 start smoking.<sup>13</sup> Many will suffer a long-term health consequence and roughly one-third of them will eventually die from a tobacco-related disease.<sup>14</sup>

## Know the Signs...

**How can you tell if a friend is using tobacco?** Sometimes it's tough to tell. But there are signs you can look for. If your friend has one or more of the following signs, he or she may be regularly using tobacco:

- Wheezing
- Coughing
- Bad breath
- Smelly hair and clothes
- Yellow-stained teeth and fingers
- Frequent colds
- Decreased senses of smell and taste
- Difficulty keeping up with sports and athletic activities
- Bleeding gums (smokeless tobacco)

- Frequent mouth sores (smokeless tobacco).

**What can you do to help someone who is using tobacco?** Be a real friend. Encourage your friend to quit. For information and referrals, call the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 800-729-6686.

For more information or for references to facts found in this *Tips for Teens*, go to [www.ncadi.samhsa.gov](http://www.ncadi.samhsa.gov).

## Q & A

### *Q. Isn't smoking sexy?*

A. Only if you think bad breath, smelly hair, yellow fingers, and coughing are sexy. Advertisements often portray smoking as glamorous and sophisticated, but think carefully about who created these ads and why.

### *Q. Is smokeless tobacco safe?*

A. No. Remember, “no smoke” doesn’t mean that smokeless tobacco is safe. Even a little smokeless tobacco has enough nicotine to get you addicted. Smokeless tobacco can lead to many types of health problems as well as cause cancer.<sup>15</sup>

### *Q. Do most teens smoke?*

A. No, out of every 100 teens, 87 **do not** use a tobacco product. Currently, the number of girls who smoke cigarettes slightly outnumbers the boys who smoke.<sup>16</sup>

### *Q. Doesn't smoking help you relax?*

A. No. Smoking can actually increase feelings of stress and nervousness. Break the cycle: Use drug-free strategies to calm your nerves like exercise and talking to your friends.

## Info

To learn more about tobacco, or obtain referrals to programs in your community, contact:

**SAMHSA**

1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)

(English and Spanish)

TDD 800-487-4889

<http://www.samhsa.gov>

<http://store.samhsa.gov>

***The bottom line:*** If you know someone who is using tobacco, urge him or her to quit. If you are using it—stop! The longer you ignore the real facts, the more chances you take with your health and well-being.

It's never too late. Talk to your parents, a doctor, a counselor, a teacher, or another adult you trust.

**Do it today!**

Curious about the TV ads of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign? Check out the Web site at <http://www.freevibe.com> or visit the Office of National Drug Control Policy Web site at <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>.