

# Smoking:

## Straight Talk for Teens



Have you ever tried smoking? Maybe your friends who smoke gave you a cigarette or cigar. Maybe you thought it would be cool. Yet your first puff was probably not pleasant. You coughed and your throat burned. You might have felt sick to your stomach or dizzy. These reactions make sense when you think about what smoking does to your body.

### Most Teens Don't Smoke

The good news is that about 80% of teenagers in the United States don't smoke. They have made a healthy choice. However, consider the following facts:

- Nearly 90% of all smokers started when they were teenagers.
- Today, 4.5 million young people, aged 12-17, smoke. Another 3,000 start smoking every day—more than 1 million teens each year.
- One third of these new smokers will eventually die of smoking-related diseases.
- Young people are more likely to smoke if they live with someone who smokes.
- Today, the smoking rates for high school seniors is at a 17-year high.

Though the numbers are surprising, perhaps the most important fact is that most American teenagers choose not to smoke.

### Smoking Harms the Body

The chemicals in cigarettes and cigars can cause a lot of damage to the body. They reduce the amount of oxygen delivered to your body. They harm the lungs by damaging the tiny hairs (called cilia) that help sweep out dirt and waste products. This leads to that annoying “smoker’s” cough. Depending on how much you smoke, your lungs become gray and “dirty,” instead of pink and healthy.

Nicotine, a drug contained in tobacco, causes the heart to beat faster and work less effectively. This is not only bad for your health, but can also lead to poor athletic performance. This is why coaches tell athletes not to smoke. Athletes who smoke cannot run or swim as well as nonsmoking athletes because the carbon monoxide in tobacco smoke robs the body of oxygen.

Early warning signs that smoking is harming you include:

- dizziness
- coughing
- burning of the eyes, nose, and throat

### Tobacco Is a Killer

The nicotine in tobacco is extremely toxic. A few drops of pure nicotine, if taken all at once, are enough to kill the average person. Smokers take nicotine in small amounts, allowing the body time to break down the nicotine and get rid of it, which is why cigarettes don't kill instantly.

Each time you take a puff on a cigarette, you also inhale over 4,000 other chemicals. Of these chemicals, 400 are toxic and about 40 are known to cause cancer. Some of the chemicals found in cigarette smoke include:

- cyanide (a deadly poison)
- benzene (used in making paints, dyes, and plastics)
- formaldehyde (embalming fluid)
- acetylene (fuel used in torches)
- ammonia (used in fertilizers)
- carbon monoxide (poisonous gas)

In the long run, your body pays a heavy price for smoking:

- Smokers get **cancer**. Smokers are more than 10 times as likely to die of lung cancer than nonsmokers. The odds are higher for people who smoke a lot, smoke for many years, and/or inhale deeply.
- Smoking doubles the chances of **heart disease**.
- Smoking is the main cause of **chronic bronchitis**, a serious disease of the airways to the lung, and **emphysema**, a crippling disease of the lung. The earlier a person starts smoking, the greater the risk of these diseases.
- Smoking by pregnant women increases the **risks of premature birth, underweight babies, and infant deaths**.
- Smoking **harms nonsmokers** as well as smokers. When nonsmokers are around people who smoke, they absorb nicotine, carbon monoxide, and other ingredients of tobacco smoke just as smokers do. This is called “passive smoking.”

Young children who are exposed to smoking are more likely to suffer from upper respiratory tract problems, *otitis media* (chronic inflammation of the middle ear), and asthma. Adult nonsmokers who are exposed can suffer from a variety of problems. They are more likely than other people to develop upper respiratory tract and lung infections, heart disease, and cancer.

### Smoking Is Addictive

It takes only a short time for users of cigarettes and cigars to become addicted to nicotine. If you are a smoker, you will know you are addicted when you find yourself craving cigarettes and feeling nervous without them. You will really know you are addicted when you try to quit smoking and have trouble doing it.

Quitting can be hard and it can take a long time. Often people try several times before they succeed. The longer you smoke, the harder it is to stop.

## Smoking Is Ugly

Studies show that smoking is harmful to health. You know that. But did you ever think about how smoking affects your looks and how people relate to you? Think about this:

- Smoking causes bad breath and stained teeth.
- Smoking often makes other people not want to be around you.
- Even if you don't smoke, you might smell like smoke after being near someone who does.
- In one study, 78% of boys, aged 12 to 17, said they don't want to date someone who smokes. In the same study, 69% of girls said they would rather date someone who doesn't smoke.

As one teenage girl put it, "Kissing a boy who smokes is like kissing a dirty ashtray."

## Smoking Is Expensive

The cost of smoking adds up. Do the math: if a pack of cigarettes costs \$2.50 and you smoke a pack a day, you are spending over \$900 a year just on cigarettes instead of on CDs, clothes, or saving for a car.

Smoking also costs you a lot in other ways—getting sick, missing school or work, and having increased medical bills. That's a high price to pay for something that isn't good for you in the first place.

## Chewing Tobacco and Snuff Are Also Harmful

Tobacco is not only found in cigarettes and cigars. Chewing tobacco and snuff ("dip") are also dangerous to health. Smokeless tobacco can cause cancer, especially in the cheeks, gums, and throat. These substances also lead to a decreased sense of taste and smell. Users run the risk of getting gum disease, which can lead to loss of teeth.

Immediately after using smokeless tobacco, the gums and lips can sting, crack, bleed, and wrinkle. Sores and white patches may appear. Mouth wounds in people who use smokeless tobacco take longer to heal.

### Smoking and the Media

Young people today are surrounded by messages in the media that smoking is normal, desirable, and harmless. Tobacco companies spend billions of dollars every year promoting their products on TV, in movies and magazines, on billboards, and at sporting events. In fact, tobacco products are among the most advertised products in the nation. If you are a teenager, you are one of the primary targets of many of these ads.

Tobacco companies and advertisers never mention the harmful effects of smoking, such as bad breath, stained teeth, heart disease, and cancer. Most ads falsely show smokers as healthy, energetic, sexy, and successful. It's important to understand the difference between the misleading messages in advertising and the truth about the dangers of smoking.

The fact is, tobacco companies need 3,000 new smokers every day to make up for the 400,000 people who die each year from tobacco-related diseases. Don't fall for the tobacco companies' tricks.

## There Is Help

Quitting is possible, and is a must if you want the best for yourself and those around you. Many young people think they are not at risk from smoking. They tell themselves, "I won't smoke forever" or "I can quit any time." However, if you ignore warning signs and continue to smoke, your body will change. It will get used to the smoke. You won't cough or feel sick every time you puff on a cigarette. Yet the damage to your body continues and worsens each time you smoke.

In order to quit, you'll need support from your family and friends. Try again if you don't succeed the first time. Deciding to stop is up to you. Once you make that commitment, you can get help from your pediatrician or school health office. For more information, visit the Web site of the American Academy of Pediatrics at [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org) or contact any of the following organizations:

American Cancer Society:  
1-800-ACS-2345/Web site: [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

American Heart Association:  
1-800-242-8721/Web site: [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

American Lung Association:  
1-800-586-4872/Web site: [www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids:  
1-800-284-KIDS/Web site: [www.tobaccofreekids.org](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org)

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

### From your doctor

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of Pediatrics



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