

SMOKELESS TOBACCO

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Over the past few decades, the use of smokeless tobacco has steadily increased. Now some people believe that if they use smokeless tobacco; that is various chews or dips that contain tobacco; that they are at less risk of cancer. That may be true in some circumstances. You may be at less risk to get lung cancer or other cancers more associated with cigarettes, but you increase your risk of various oral cancers such as cancer of the tongue, lip or throat. You are also at great risk for cardiac or heart problems, nicotine addiction and high blood pressure. Your teeth and breath are at just as much risk, causing extreme bad breath and severe damage to the teeth.

For years, it has been portrayed in movies and on television that smoking or using smokeless tobacco was the “in” thing to do. It was cool if you were doing and not cool if you were not. Cancer has been linked to tobacco since the year 1761, when a physician in London, England linked snuff, or dry powdered tobacco to cancer. Unfortunately, spit tobacco is making a comeback. People find it easier to “dip” or “chew” in places that have banned smoking or they know that second hand smoke is bad for others. But advertisements are targeting both the young and the old, sponsoring concerts, sporting events and even being endorsed by athletes or musicians, even if the people seeing the ads are too young to buy the product itself. Peer pressure is extremely strong especially during the teen years. Many young people find it hard to say no, especially if their friends are using tobacco products.

Facts about smokeless tobacco:

1. Smokeless tobacco causes bad breath. It may not be noticeable to the user, but it can be very unpleasant to others, especially in romantic situations.
2. Smokeless tobacco causes stains on the teeth.
3. Wounds on the inside of the mouth such as cold sores, cuts or oral surgery can take longer to heal.
4. Leathery white patches called oral leukoplakia may appear where the tobacco is held.
5. Gum loss can occur due to smokeless tobacco. Permanent loss occurs in the area where the tobacco is held. A dentist can spot this damage 3 months after a patient begins using chew or dip tobacco.
6. Smokeless tobacco can cause cancer of the tongue, cheek, larynx (voice box) and pharynx (upper throat area). The treatment is usually surgery and or radiation therapy. If your larynx is removed, you lose the ability to speak, laugh out loud and swim and you must breathe through a hole in your throat.
7. Smokeless tobacco is an expensive habit. A tin per day can cost you almost \$1400 per year. You could fly to Hawaii round trip, stay for a week and rent a car!!!

So how do you not get all these nasty and harmful results? Well the first way is to not start in the first place. Parents should educate their children about the dangers and harmful effects that tobacco has on the body. If you have already started, try and quit as soon as possible. The younger you stop your habit and the less time you have spent using smokeless tobacco, the lower the chances you will get the harmful results. Learn to say “No” or “No thanks, I’ll pass” or even “I care about my body”. By showing others that you can say no, that may catch on as others may use that as an example. So, if you haven’t started yet, why take the risk of all the harmful effects, let alone spend all your hard earned money on a habit that can kill you.

Some benefits of stopping your smokeless tobacco habits:

1. You will have a healthier body.
2. Your blood pressure and cholesterol will come down.
3. Your taste and smell will get better. Tobacco can lead people to use too much salt and sugar on their food because the taste buds affected by tobacco and nicotine.
4. Avoid nicotine poisoning. If tobacco juice is swallowed; it can cause nausea, vomiting and sweating. Swallowing tobacco itself can be fatal.

Different ways to quit smokeless tobacco:

1. List your reasons for why you like to use tobacco (you think it makes you look cool, sort of relaxes you etc.); then list the ways you don’t like tobacco (i.e. stains your teeth, cost too much money, etc.)
2. If you can’t quit right away, switch brands. Sometimes a new taste can make help you quit.
3. Seek support from others. Ask someone who has quit. Take a tobacco cessation class. Use nicotine gum, the nicotine patch or other medications that you can get once you are enrolled in a class.
4. Change your habits that are associated with your nicotine use.
5. Eat healthier, use sugarless gum instead of chew. Drink more water.
6. Exercise. This can reduce stress associated with tobacco and renew energy.
7. Think of your family....one of the most important things in life is family. If you don’t quit for yourself...quit for them.

If you have questions concerning smokeless tobacco, contact the Wellness Center located in the Dental building across from the hospital or call (559) 998-2697. Tobacco Cessation classes are held every Thursday at 1500, with a new class starting the first Thursday of the month and run an additional 3 weeks meeting on Thursdays. The class is a self enrolling class and no consultation is needed. Just show up a few minutes before class to fill out a short packet of paperwork. If for some reason you can not make the group session, contact us at (559) 998-2697 to make arrangements. You had to learn how to use tobacco products, now it is time to learn how to stop.