

Facts about Tobacco

Tobacco is an addictive drug. Cigarettes, cigars, chew, snuff, dip, and pipe tobacco contain the addictive drug, nicotine. Nicotine stimulates the brain to make the user feel more aware or relaxed. Regular users of nicotine often need more to get the same effect, and eventually become physically dependent.

Tobacco causes illness and death. Tobacco use is a factor in more deaths than all other drugs combined. Smokers have ten times the risk of lung cancer and two times the risk of heart disease of nonsmokers. Chew, dip, or snuff users are four times more likely to develop oral cancer than are nonusers. Eighty percent of deaths from lung diseases such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis can be attributed to smoking.

Using smokeless tobacco is not safer than smoking. An average portion of dip chew in the mouth for 30 minutes provides as much or more nicotine to the body as smoking a cigarette. Nitrosamines, a cancer-causing agent, is found in far greater quantities in smokeless tobacco than in other forms of tobacco.

Secondhand smoke is hazardous to health. In 1992, the Environmental Protection Agency concluded that environmental tobacco smoke (smoke from a burning cigarette or exhaled by smokers) is a cancer-causing agent, with no safe level of exposure. Prolonged exposure contributes to impaired lung function, lung cancer, heart disease, and other cancers. Children exposed to secondhand smoke have a greater risk of reduced growth, respiratory problems, middle ear infection, and asthma.

Quitting tobacco use decreases your risk for disease. A few days after quitting, the former smoker can notice benefits such as easier breathing and enhanced sense of taste and smell. Only one-third of quitters gain weight. The risk of heart disease, stroke, emphysema and cancer declines with decreased tobacco use. Ten years after quitting, a former smoker can expect to live just as long as someone who has never smoked.

A woman who smokes increases her risk of lung cancer two to three times. Lung cancer has become the leading cancer-caused death among women. Women who smoke and use oral contraceptives have higher risks of strokes, heart attacks and blood clots in their legs. Women who smoke have babies smaller than normal in weight and size. Quitting smoking before or during pregnancy greatly increases the chance of a healthier baby.

If you or a family member is experiencing a mental health or an alcohol or other drug-related emergency, seek immediate assistance by calling the 24-hour Suicide Prevention, Mental Health Crisis, Information and Referral Hotline: (216) 623-6888 or the United Way's First Call for Help, 211 or (216) 436-2000.