

Facts About Tobacco

What is tobacco?

Tobacco comes from the dried leaves of the tobacco plant. Tobacco contains nicotine, a stimulant drug that speeds up messages travelling between the brain and the body. Nicotine is the drug in tobacco that causes addiction. As well as nicotine, there are more than 7000 chemicals in tobacco, and at least 250 are known to be harmful.

Of these 250 harmful chemicals, at least 60 can cause cancer. These chemicals are the reason why people get sick and experience long term harms from smoking.

Some of these chemicals are:

acetone (commonly found in nail polish remover)

cadmium (commonly found in batteries)

hydrogen cyanide (commonly found in rat and insect poison).

How does it work?

When people smoke, nicotine goes into the bloodstream and is carried into the brain, releasing chemicals like dopamine.

These chemicals make people feel good resulting in:

feelings of calmness

reduced hunger

better concentration.

How do people use it?

Tobacco is mostly smoked in cigarettes, but it can also be smoked in a pipe or cigar. Tobacco is also contained in products like snuff (which is inhaled through the nostrils), chewed or placed against the gums.

What are the short term harms of smoking?

Some of the short term harms from smoking tobacco include:

coughing

dizziness and headaches

increased heart beat

bad breath

tingling and numbness in fingers and toes

reduced appetite, stomach cramps and nausea

higher frequency of colds.

What are the long term harms of smoking?

Some of the long term harms from smoking tobacco include an increased risk of:

developing cancer (of the lungs, mouth, lips, throat, stomach, liver, pancreas, kidney and bladder)

heart disease (including stroke)

lung disease (bronchitis, emphysema)

type 2 diabetes

high blood pressure

eye conditions (macular degeneration and blindness)

loss of taste and smell

hearing loss.

Passive smoking

When someone breathes in exhaled smoke from other people it is known as passive smoking. Passive smoking can cause health issues that are as severe as the ones experienced by smokers, including:

cancer

asthma, and respiratory issues

ear infections.

People particularly at risk from passive smoking include:

young children

pregnant women.

Is it safe to smoke during pregnancy?

Smoking while pregnant can be harmful to the baby, as the poisons from tobacco can be passed through to the baby.

Smoking while pregnant has been known to:

cause the baby to be born early (premature)

affect the baby's birth weight (too small) which is linked to poor health when they grow up

increase the likelihood of birth deformities.

Women who are planning a pregnancy are encouraged to quit before getting pregnant, and as early as possible if they are already pregnant.