

# TOBACCO

Over the years there have been a number of slogans created to emphasise the effects of tobacco on our health and the benefits of choosing not to smoke. Slogans such as: *Kissing a smoker is like licking an ashtray* or *Cigarettes burn holes in your pocket* or *Don't let your future go up in smoke* have appealed to our emotions, our bank balances, and our interest in our own physical and emotional health. So, what is tobacco and why is there so much effort put into convincing us not to smoke it?

## WHAT'S TOBACCO?

Tobacco is a plant product containing mainly nicotine, cellulose, ammonia, and protein. Before it can be consumed, the tobacco leaves are picked, separated from their stems, dried and cured. The processed dried leaves are then used to produce cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, pipe tobacco and shisha tobacco.

Of the more than 4,000 chemicals present in cigarette smoke, more than 60 have been identified as cancer-causing chemicals (Hoffmann, Hoffmann, & El-Bayoumy, 2001). When you inhale cigarette smoke these chemicals enter your lungs and spread through your body via blood and lymph systems.

We know that the main chemical ingredient in tobacco is nicotine. Nicotine is a stimulant drug that speeds up the messages travelling between the brain and body. In order to provide a strong psychoactive reaction, nicotine must be delivered rapidly to the brain. The inhalation of tobacco smoke into the lungs rapidly delivers nicotine via the bloodstream to the brain, where it acts upon receptors. Nicotine, like all addictive drugs, causes a complex range of biochemical changes that can create dependence, which is reinforced by the challenging and adverse effects of withdrawal.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2017) says that tobacco kills up to half of its users and that there is 'no safe level of exposure to tobacco smoke'. In fact, tobacco kills more than seven million people around the world each year. More than six million of these deaths are the result of direct tobacco use while around 890 000 are the result of non-smokers being exposed to second-hand smoke (passive smoking). WHO also says that creating 100% smoke-free environments is the only way to protect people from the harmful effects of second-hand tobacco smoke.

## WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF TOBACCO ON THE BODY?

Like all drugs, tobacco affects everyone differently according to factors such as: size, weight and health; if they are a regular smoker; the amount smoked; the strength of the tobacco; and how much is contained in the product. In small doses the user may experience: alertness, happiness and relaxation; coughing, dizziness or headaches; increased heart beat; bad breath; reduced appetite, stomach cramps or vomiting; and tingling and numbness in the fingers and toes.

Over a longer period of time the effects can eventually cause a number of issues. Using the four Ls model adapted from Roizen (1979), we can consider the impact of tobacco use on four major spheres of your life.

**Liver** is the first L and looks at any problems to do with a person's physical, psychological or emotional health. Using tobacco can cause shortness of breath; stained teeth and fingers; coughing fits, asthma and lung diseases; early wrinkles; dependency on the drug; cancer; difficulty getting an erection or having children; stroke, heart attack and brain damage.

The second L stands for **Lover** and includes the problems caused by tobacco use associated with relationships, family, friends and children. For example, friendships may change if you are choosing to smoke or not to smoke.

**Lifestyle or livelihood** is the third L and includes the financial and work problems that could result from tobacco use such as managing the increasing costs of tobacco use.

And the last L is **Legal** and includes any problems associated with the law such as being charged for smoking in a prohibited area.

## WHAT ARE THE TRENDS AROUND TOBACCO USE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

The good news is that most young people are choosing not to smoke (White & Williams, 2016; ARACY, 2018) and as soon as you quit smoking there are immediate and long-term health benefits, even if smoking-related health problems already exist. In fact, quitting smoking reduces a young person's risk of dying prematurely (Cancer Council, 2017). Research has also shown that people



live substantially longer when they stop smoking and the earlier people quit the greater the reduction in the negative effects experienced (Cancer Council, 2017).

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MYTHS ABOUT TOBACCO USE?

**Myth 1 – Is smoking 'light' or 'low tar' cigarettes less harmful than regular cigarettes?** No. There is little difference between the amount of chemicals inhaled by people who smoke 'light' cigarettes and those who smoke regular ones. When people smoke fewer or weaker cigarettes they often will smoke each cigarette more intensely to extract more nicotine.

**Myth 2 – Is there an increased risk from tobacco use when you are also on the contraceptive pill?** Yes, there is. When you combine the effects of nicotine with those of birth control pills, you have an increased chance of stroke and heart attack. This is because nicotine causes your blood pressure to rise and your heart rate to accelerate. Knowing the risks can help you make safer choices.

**Myth 3 – Everyone gains weight when they stop smoking?** Not true. Not everyone puts on weight when they quit smoking. We are all different so our experience around weight gain will be unique to us.

### A NOTE ABOUT SHISHA

Shisha (or waterpipe) smoking is not a safe alternative to cigarette smoking for the smoker or those around them.

Shisha usually contains tobacco which is sometimes mixed with fruit or molasses sugar. Popular flavours include apple, strawberry, mint and cola. A WHO (2015) report stated that a waterpipe smoker could, in a typical shisha smoking session of between 20-80 minutes, inhale as much smoke as a cigarette smoker would inhale in 100 cigarettes.

In WA the selling, displaying and the smoking of shisha is regulated by law. The same legal requirements apply to shisha as other tobacco products like cigarettes.

So, what can we take away from all of this information?

1. Tobacco smoke contains more than 4000 chemicals; over 60 of which are known to cause cancer.
2. Quitting smoking reduces your risk of dying prematurely and research has shown that people live substantially longer when they stop smoking.
3. Nicotine, the main chemical ingredient in tobacco, is addictive and can cause a complex range of biochemical changes in the body that can create dependence.



### NEED HELP?

**Quitline 13 78 48**

Contact Quitline if you want to quit smoking. This confidential, free service will provide you with information, advice, encouragement and support to help you quit.

### REFERENCES

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