

Adolescents and Tobacco

The young adolescent is at particular risk to start smoking. What begins as an act of independence may rapidly become a dependence on nicotine, one of the most addictive drugs known.

MOST SMOKERS BEGIN IN THEIR TEENAGE YEARS

The younger people start smoking cigarettes, the stronger the addiction is likely to be. Once addicted, only a small percentage of smokers are likely to quit. Adolescents who have smoked as few as 100 cigarettes report that they would like to quit but cannot. Those who make it through their teen years without starting will probably never take up the habit.

SMOKING CAN AFFECT HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Because young people's bodies are still developing, cigarette smoking can limit their lung growth and function. Young smokers are less fit than nonsmokers and often have coughing spells, wheezing, and more overall health problems.

Smoking may also affect a young person's mental health. New research shows that cigarette smoking can contribute to depression and the development of serious anxiety disorders in only a few years after starting to smoke.

SMOKING CAN AFFECT PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Smoking can affect how young people look and feel about themselves. Smoking stains teeth and fingers and can cause early aging of the skin. Because of oxygen deprivation, the skin can look gray or yellow.

SMOKING CAN AFFECT A SMOKER'S CHILDREN

A pregnant woman who smokes brings both nicotine and carbon monoxide into the bloodstream of her unborn baby. As a result, the baby may be born with low birth weight, birth defects, and breathing difficulties. Children who live with

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smokers are sick more often, too. They have more colds, earaches, flu, asthma, and lung infections and miss more school than other children.

CHEWING TOBACCO CAN LEAD TO ADDICTION AND MOUTH CANCERS

Even though smokeless tobacco is often advertised as a “safe” alternative, users can easily become addicted. Regular users can lose teeth and develop serious gum problems, blisters, and ulcers in their mouths. These sores can appear in as little as six months in places where the tobacco touches the tissues. From there, cancers can develop.