

Smoking Stinks!

Smoking is one of the worst things you can do to your body. Yet every single day, about 3,200 kids and teens start smoking.

Most middle school students don't smoke — only about 1 in 50 does. And most high school students don't smoke either — about 9 in 100 do.

But why do those who smoke ever begin?

There's more than just one answer. Some kids may start smoking just because they're curious. Others may like the idea of doing something dangerous — something grownups don't want them to do. Still others might know lots of people who smoke and they might think it's a way to act or look like an adult.

Fortunately, fewer people are starting smoking than a few years ago. Maybe that's because more and more people have learned that smoking and tobacco use can cause cancer and heart disease.

But sometimes kids can't really think that far into the future to worry about an illness they might not get for many years.

So let's talk about the problems that might affect kids more quickly:

- bad breath
- yellow teeth
- smelly clothes
- more colds and coughs
- difficulty keeping up with friends when playing sports
- empty wallet — cigarettes and tobacco products are very expensive!

Let's find out more about cigarettes and tobacco.

What Are Smoking and Smokeless Tobacco?

Tobacco (say: tuh-BA-ko) is a plant that can be smoked in cigarettes, pipes, or cigars. It's the same plant that's in smokeless tobacco, known as dip, chew, snuff, spit, or chewing tobacco. Smokeless tobacco is not lit or inhaled like tobacco in cigarettes, pipes, and cigars. Instead, smokeless tobacco is put between the lip and gum and sucked on inside the mouth.

Tobacco contains nicotine (say: NIH-kuh-teen), a chemical that causes a tingly or pleasant feeling — but that feeling only lasts for a little while. Nicotine is also addictive (say: uh-DIK-tiv). That means that if you start to use nicotine, your body and mind will become so used to it that you'll need to have it just to feel OK.

Anyone who starts smoking could become addicted to it. If you're addicted to something, it's very hard to stop doing it, even if you want to. Some kids get addicted right away. And adults are often addicted, which is why so many of them have a hard time quitting smoking.

Why Is It So Bad for You?

Cigarettes and smokeless tobacco kill hundreds of thousands of Americans every year. In fact, each day 1300 people die from smoking alone.

The nicotine and other poisonous chemicals in tobacco cause lots of diseases, like heart problems and some kinds of cancer. If you smoke, you hurt your lungs and heart each time you light up. It also can make it more difficult for blood to move around in the body, so smokers may feel tired and cranky. The longer you smoke, the worse the damage becomes.

The Other Cost of Smoking

Using tobacco eats up a lot of money, too. A pack of cigarettes costs about \$6, on average. That means, even if you buy just one pack a week, you'll spend \$312 in a year. Some people smoke a pack a day, which adds up to \$2,190! That's a lot of computer games and clothes you could buy instead.

What's It Like?

Usually, people don't like smoking or chewing tobacco at first. Your body is smart, and it knows when it's being poisoned. When people try smoking for the first time, they often cough a lot and feel pain or burning in their throat and lungs. This is your lungs' way of trying to protect you and tell you to keep them smoke free.

Also, many people say that they feel sick to their stomachs or even throw up. If someone accidentally swallows chewing tobacco, they may be sick for hours. Yuck.

What if My Friend Smokes?

If you have friends who smoke or use tobacco, you can help them by encouraging them to quit. Here are some reasons you can mention:

- It will hurt their health.
- It will make their breath stinky.
- It will turn their teeth yellow.
- It will give them less endurance when running or playing sports.
- It's expensive.
- It's illegal to buy cigarettes when you're underage.

If you think it will help, you could print out articles like this one to give to a friend who smokes. He or she may be interested in learning more about the dangers of smoking.

But people don't like to hear that they're doing something wrong, so your pal also could be a little angry. If that happens, don't push it too much. In time, your friend may realize you are right.

In the meantime, it could help to talk with a parent or a school counselor if you're worried about your friend. When your friend is ready, a grownup can help him or her quit for good. If your friend decides to quit, lend your support. You might say it's time to kick some butts!

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