

# ***Smokeless Tobacco***

***The University of WI-Stevens Point is a tobacco-free campus***

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## ***What is Smokeless Tobacco?***

Smokeless tobacco comes in two forms, chew and snuff. Tobacco is chewed by placing a wad of it between the cheek and teeth and sucking on it. Snuff is dipped by placing a pinch between the lower lip and teeth where it mixes with saliva and is absorbed. Many people find the use of smokeless tobacco undesirable. The user has an increased amount of saliva and must either swallow the tobacco juices or spit often. Users also develop bad breath and discolored teeth.

## ***Save Your Life***

97% of adults report not using smokeless tobacco, yet more than 8,000 people (CDC) die every year die every year from oral cancers. Using spit tobacco increases your chances of developing cancer in many parts of your mouth, neck, and head as smokeless tobacco contains 28 cancer-causing agents. After expensive, often painful treatments, dying from cancer is still a tragic reality every year for thousands of spit tobacco users. Therefore, spit tobacco is not a safe substitute for smoking.

## ***Risks & Effects of Smokeless Tobacco***

Tobacco and its by-products are extremely irritating to sensitive oral tissues. "Smokeless" tobacco causes many problems.

A look inside a smokeless tobacco user's mouth will often reveal soft tissues on the inside of the cheek that appear peculiarly wrinkled, thickened and white. These leathery appearing areas are called "leukoplakia." Leukoplakia is caused by irritation from direct contact with tobacco juice. Many cancer-producing substances have been identified in tobacco juices. 40-60 % of smokeless tobacco users exhibit leukoplakia, and about 6% of these users will develop oral cancer.

Smokeless tobacco users tend to have greater tooth wear than non-users. The gums also tend to recede from the teeth in areas near where tobacco is held. The bare roots are more susceptible to decay and more sensitive to heat, cold, air, certain foods and chemicals. Sweetened tobacco may increase tooth decay. Tobacco products decrease the user's ability to taste and smell bitter, salty, and sweet foods,

therefore, tobacco users add more salt and sugar to their food. Excessive salt contributes to abnormal blood pressure and kidney disease. Tobacco juices also contain hundreds of chemicals, which may delay wound healing. Tobacco can be especially undesirable when a tooth has been pulled or when oral surgery has taken place.

## ***Addiction and Other Effects of Nicotine***

Nicotine is the addictive part of tobacco and is found in tobacco juice as well as cigarette smoke. It is readily absorbed through the lining of the mouth and directly affects the nervous system. Nicotine first causes the user to be stimulated or excited and then causes him to be depressed or let down. To feel good a person with the nicotine habit needs a "booster" every 20 to 30 minutes while awake.

Nicotine also affects the heart and the rest of the circulatory system. As nicotine enters the bloodstream, the arteries tighten and become smaller, the blood platelets clot and the heart rate increases. Since the heart is beating faster, it is pumping more blood through a narrower opening. A rise in blood pressure may result, which may increase risk of strokes and heart attacks.

## ***When Quitting Appears Difficult***

Quitting means fighting an addiction to nicotine, which has been proven to be as powerful an addiction as that of heroin and cocaine. There are several pharmacologic aids to help quitters be successful such as the nicotine patch and non-nicotine aids such as Zyban. Both help to ease your body's craving for nicotine.

## ***Helpful Tips for Withdrawal***

- Tell your friends and family that you are quitting and hang out with people who don't use smokeless tobacco
- Breathe fresh air deeply and enjoy your favorite exercise
- Brush your teeth and chew sugarless gum or candy
- Throw away any spit tobacco you have left and avoid situations that will tempt you to use tobacco.

Developed by American Cancer Society/Texas Division in consultation with The Texas Interagency Council on Smoking and Health



This document was prepared by the staff of the UWSP Student Health Promotion Office.  
This information should not be used in lieu of medical care.  
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