



## 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.



Passive smoking can also harm the baby, so pregnant women should try to avoid being near other people who are smoking.

## Giving up

Giving up smoking and tobacco can be very difficult for people who have been using it a long time, as the body becomes dependent on nicotine. However stopping at any age can improve a smoker's health and increase their life expectancy, even for those who are long-term smokers.

Withdrawal symptoms usually appear an hour after the last cigarette. Symptoms include:

- ⊙ cravings
- ⊙ feeling worried
- ⊙ difficulty concentrating
- ⊙ feeling tense and frustrated
- ⊙ headaches
- ⊙ dizziness
- ⊙ constipation
- ⊙ depression.

## E-cigarettes

Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) are battery-operated devices that are used to inhale nicotine (and other chemicals) through vapour, rather than through smoke. E-cigarettes have a cartridge (which can contain nicotine, as well as flavouring and other chemicals), that can be replaced or refilled. Heat is used to turn the liquid in the cartridge into vapour.

There is some uncertainty whether e-cigarettes can help people quit smoking, however there is not yet any evidence to say whether they are effective or not. The short and long term effects on health of using e-cigarettes is not yet known as they have not been around for very long.

E-cigarettes are currently banned in a number of Australian states and territories due to regulations around the sale and possession of nicotine.

## Helping someone to quit

There are a number of services that can help people to quit smoking as well as help ex-smokers who might still be experiencing tobacco cravings, or going through withdrawals. *Quitline* is a national telephone service that provides confidential support for people who would like to quit smoking. Some states and territories, such as Victoria and

New South Wales, provide an *Aboriginal Quitline*, which offers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific counselling support.

If you would like help or support to quit smoking, you can call [Quitline](#) or [Aboriginal Quitline](#) at 13 78 48.

Local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) can also provide support to anyone wanting to quit smoking, via a GP or Aboriginal Health Worker. You can get in touch with your local ACCHO to see what kind of support they offer.

## Nicotine replacement therapy

Some products that contain nicotine, such as patches, gum, lozenges, sprays and inhalers, can be used by smokers to help them quit smoking. They can replace the use of cigarettes, and give smokers a higher chance of quitting. This is known as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). These products contain less nicotine than a cigarette, and don't have the toxic chemicals that cigarettes do. NRT aims to help reduce the cravings that people going through withdrawal might experience. NRT patches are free for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people via the *Pharmaceutical benefits scheme* (PBS) with a script from a Health Worker or doctor.

## Other medicines to help quit smoking

There are some medicines available (without nicotine) that can help smokers quit, like varenicline (Champix) and bupropion (Zyban SR, Clorprax, Prexaton or Bupropion-RL and others). These medicines help reduce the cravings for a cigarette, and are prescribed by a doctor or nurse practitioner. These medicines are available via the PBS.



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