

Tobacco / Nicotine

Tobacco is produced from the leaves of the tobacco plant which are dried, cured, aged and combined with other ingredients. Tobacco smoke contains more than 4000 chemicals many of them poisonous. Tobacco is most commonly smoked in the form of cigarettes, cigars, or pipe tobacco however, it is also available as chewing tobacco, snus and snuff. Snus is a powdered tobacco which is placed inside the upper lip as an alternative to smoking. In Nordic countries it is seen as a harm reduction method for people who are heavily dependent on nicotine.

The active ingredient in tobacco is nicotine. Nicotine is highly addictive.

The other main chemicals in tobacco smoke are:

- Tar is a sticky black substance released when tobacco is burned.
- Carbon Monoxide, a highly toxic, colourless, odourless gas which displaces oxygen in the blood. Carbon Monoxide levels are much higher in smokers than in non-smokers.

Immediate Effects

These may include:

- Initial stimulation followed by reduction in activity of the brain and nervous system
- Feelings of relaxation
- Bad breath
- Decreased blood flow to fingers and toes
- Decreased appetite
- Dizziness / Headache
- Coughing due to smoke irritation
- Nausea and vomiting
- Increased blood pressure and heart rate

Long Term Effects

These may include:

- Wrinkling of skin and premature ageing
- Loss of taste and smell
- Yellow teeth/yellow fingertips/bad breath
- Coughing fits, Asthma, Chronic bronchitis, emphysema
- Increased risk of infections,
- Slow wound healing
- Restrictions in blood flow that can lead to heart attack, loss of limbs,
- Increased risk of stroke and brain damage
- Cancer
- Heart disease

Approximately 50% of smokers will die of a smoking related cause.

Would you like information on how to quit smoking? Go to:

<https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/smoking-and-tobacco/how-to-quit-smoking>

E-cigarettes

While it is acknowledged that electronic cigarettes are likely to be less dangerous than tobacco products, the health effects of their use remain unknown. Products inhaled directly to the lung are normally only approved after extensive safety and efficacy evaluation due to the serious issues that can potentially arise with this form of substance delivery. A formal approval process also ensures that consumers are provided with specific guidance on safe and appropriate use. Electronic cigarettes currently on the market in Australia have not gone through these kinds of assessment processes.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and other researchers are concerned about the safety of the chemical combinations used across the variety of products available. These chemical combinations have not been evaluated for either short-term or long-term safety.

Use of e-cigarettes to assist smokers to quit

Currently there is not enough evidence that supports the use of e-cigarettes to help smokers to quit. The Therapeutic Goods Administration has not approved e-cigarettes as a nicotine replacement therapy to help smokers to quit.

Legal and Social Issues

There are federal and state laws which regulate the advertising, promotion and sale of tobacco and where it may be smoked. It is illegal to sell or give tobacco products or herbal cigarettes to persons under the age of 18 or to purchase them for a person under 18.

All states and territories ban smoking in enclosed public spaces, workplaces, indoor environments such as public transport, schools, hospitals, cinemas, shopping centres, restaurants and cafes and some outdoor areas. The places where smoking is banned may vary between states, territories and local areas. In some states it is illegal to smoke in a car when a person under the age of 16 or 17 is in the car.

Penalties for smoking in a non-smoking area can include formal cautions and fines.

The laws regulating E-cigarettes are extremely complicated. Nicotine is classed as a Schedule 7 poison and so it is illegal to sell, possess or use E-cigarettes containing nicotine unless the products have been approved, authorised or licensed. There are currently no authorised products in Australia. E-cigarettes which do not contain nicotine may be legally available in some jurisdictions. However, in SA and WA it is illegal to sell any product that resembles tobacco products.

Adapted from Drug Facts (Nicotine), Alcohol and Drug Foundation, 2019.