



Pick Your Path to Health

Tobacco and What Else?

Let's face it-it's way too easy to get addicted to the nicotine in cigarettes. Believe it or not-cigarettes are not the only way women are getting nicotine. Women who are addicted to nicotine have many choices-all of them laced with serious health consequences.

So if you are trying to quit smoking by finding other "less potent" methods, quitting altogether is your only option to improve your health.

Cigarettes

If you're trying to quit cigarettes by "graduating down" to lighter types, reconsider your choices. The only safe choice is to totally kick the habit. Smoking even a few cigarettes a day can hurt your health. If you try to smoke fewer cigarettes, but do not stop completely, soon you'll be smoking the same amount again. Smoking "low-tar, low-nicotine" cigarettes doesn't help, either. Studies show that because nicotine is so addictive, if you switch to lower-nicotine brands you'll likely just puff harder, longer, and more often on each cigarette.

Smokeless Tobacco

Cigarettes are not the only problem. There's also chewing tobacco and snuff. Just because these tobacco products are smokeless doesn't mean they are safe. And they are not just used by men!

According to the Surgeon General's Report on Women and Smoking, chewing tobacco and snuff are associated with oral leukoplakia (thickened white patches on mucous membranes, such as in the mouth) and oral cancer and may increase the risk of tooth loss and gum disease. They may also increase the risk of heart disease.

Older women are more likely to use smokeless tobacco. Of African American women aged 55 and older, 19 percent had used smokeless tobacco in their lifetime and 12 percent were current daily users, according to the Surgeon General's report. A 1985 study of current use of smokeless tobacco in 10 areas of the Southeast also reported high use among African American women aged 70 or older. This prevalence was higher than that of any age, race, or gender group. In any age group, African American

women are more likely than white women to use smokeless tobacco, in fact, among racial and ethnic groups, African American women are the only women who are as likely to use smokeless tobacco as are men of their race.

Cigars and Pipes

Apart from the cigarettes, there are other choices that are chock-full of smoke that entice women with pleasant aromas. Although women are less likely than men to smoke a pipe, the same isn't true for the ever-popular cigar. Hollywood is sporting it in movies and there are even cigar clubs where you go to, what else? Smoke a cigar, of course.

Women who smoke cigars may be seeking that edgy, independent, glamorous look, but they are just putting their health at risk. Just like cigarettes, pipe or cigar smoking increases the risk for cancers of the lung, voice box, mouth, and throat. According to the Surgeon General, recent studies have concluded that cigar smoking does in fact cause these types of cancer and probably also cancer of the pancreas. Persons who smoke cigars heavily and those who inhale cigar smoke deeply are at increased risk for heart and lung diseases.

According to the Surgeon General, from 1992 through 1998, the percentage of women who had ever smoked a cigar increased. This increase occurred primarily among women 18 through 44 years of age, but not among older women.

Bidis and Kreteks

Homemade cigarettes, such as bidis and kreteks, can be dangerous. Kreteks are clove cigarettes made in Indonesia that contain clove extract and tobacco. Bidis are small, brown, hand-rolled cigarettes from India and other Southeast Asian countries. The tobacco is wrapped in a leaf and tied on one end with a string. When tested on a standard smoking machine, bidis produce higher levels of carbon monoxide, nicotine, and tar than do regular cigarettes, according to the Surgeon General's Report on Women and Smoking. Because of the low combustibility of the wrapper, bidi smokers inhale more often and more deeply than do cigarette smokers. Studies suggest that bidi users are at increased risk for heart disease and cancers of the mouth, lung, voice box, throat, stomach, and liver. Clove cigarettes can cause serious illnesses such as pneumonia, bronchitis and life threatening lung conditions. Not only should women stay away from

these products, they should encourage the men in their lives to learn about the dangers.

Steps to Better Health

There are no safe tobacco products. Fighting nicotine addiction is a tough battle. But it is the only choice to improve your health and stay healthy.

Better health is worth the effort it takes to quit. As a first step, call the National Women's Health Information Center for help and information at 1-800-994-WOMAN or visit the "Breath of Fresh Air" Web site at <http://www.4woman.gov/QuitSmoking/index.cfm>

Call today to start on your path to better health.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign or to subscribe to the listserv to receive tips on improving your health, call 1-800-994-WOMAN or TDD at 1-888-220-5446 or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov>