



Nicotine Addiction

Why Tobacco Is a Habit-Forming Drug

If you or anyone close to you smokes cigarettes, you're probably well aware that smoking is a habit, one that takes some effort to break. Through inhalation, the chemical components of cigarettes are injected into your lungs, your bloodstream and then your brain. Learning some of the facts about tobacco may encourage you to break the habit in order to lead a healthier life.

Nicotine Is Habit-Forming

Nicotine, one of the main chemical components of tobacco, is a habit-forming drug that draws the smoker into both a physical and a psychological partnership with cigarettes. Once you learn the mechanics of smoking—and it definitely is an acquired technique taking conscious effort on the part of the novice smoker—you may begin to rely on cigarettes for what you believe to be stimulation, relaxation or stress relief. Your body becomes chemically addicted to nicotine and the more you smoke, the more difficult it is to quit.

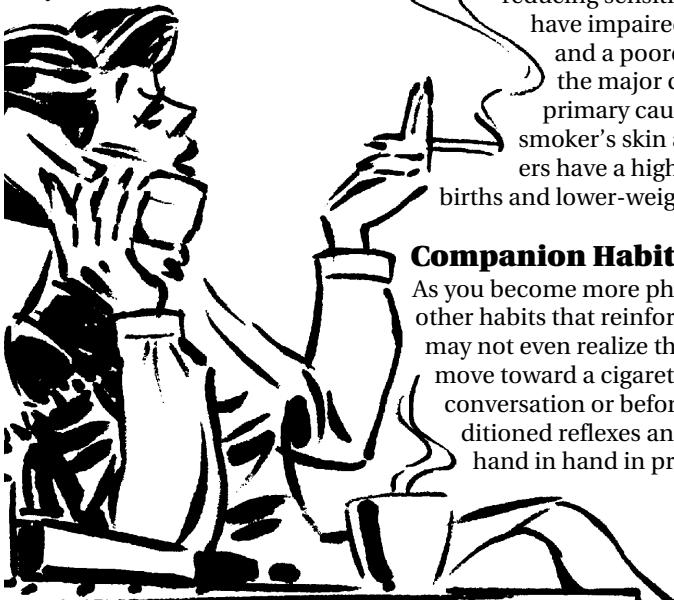
More Chemicals

The average cigarette generally contains about 8.4 milligrams of nicotine and 15 milligrams of tar. Tobacco smoke also contains as many as 4,000 other naturally occurring gases, particles and compounds, including carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, hydrogen cyanide, traces of arsenic and carcinogens.

Other Sources of Nicotine

Cigarettes are considered the most harmful form of tobacco use because cigarette smokers usually inhale deeply. But pipes and cigars hold risks of nicotine addiction as well. Chewing tobacco and snuff can also cause cancer, gum disease and erosion of the teeth.

“Companion habits” such as picking up the phone or pouring a cup of coffee, can reinforce the role of cigarettes in your daily routine.



Physical Effects

When inhaled, nicotine stimulates the central nervous system. The chemicals in a cigarette move to the brain through the bloodstream, causing a rise in blood pressure and heart rate, constricting of the blood vessels, and reducing sensitivity to pain and stress. Chronic smokers often have impaired senses of taste and smell, less physical stamina and a poorer execution of motor tasks. Smoking is among the major causes of heart disease and lung cancer and is the primary cause of chronic bronchitis and emphysema. A smoker's skin ages and wrinkles prematurely and female smokers have a higher incidence of unsuccessful pregnancies, stillbirths and lower-weight babies.

Companion Habits

As you become more physically addicted to tobacco, you will develop other habits that reinforce the role of cigarettes in your daily routine. You may not even realize this is happening. A cup of coffee may trigger a move toward a cigarette. You may light up before you begin a phone conversation or before starting your car. These become similar to conditioned reflexes and show that the physical and the psychological go hand in hand in promoting and furthering addiction.