

Smokeless Tobacco

- A slow poison by choice



Tobacco, in any form, is injurious to health. There's no such thing as a safe tobacco product. All habits start very small, but don't end small. Better not to begin, rather than to struggle to quit.

Do you like having worn out gums? Oh, probably do you enjoy chronic bad breath? Then are you in the market of mouth cancer? Do you want mounting dental problems? Okay, so, are you a fan of jaw removal surgery?

If everything is a no, then I should ask you, if you knew there were over 3000 harmful compounds in your favourite cup of coffee in the morning, would you still drink the cup of coffee? Probably not!! Then, why would you decide to put

chewing tobacco in your mouth? There are 3000 different chemical compounds and 28 cancer causing agents in every single measure of smokeless tobacco you put in your mouth. That alone should be reason enough to quit, don't you think? Think! Oh, sorry! If you had actually thought about all this, then this article wouldn't have been necessary.

You don't smoke it. You don't swallow it. All you do is slosh it around your mouth and spit out the brown juices every few seconds. It is actually pretty disgusting, but so

what? After all, it's called smokeless or chewing tobacco. So, it can't be as bad as inhaling tobacco smoke into the lungs. Right? Wrong! Unfortunately, smokeless doesn't mean harmless. The fact is, chewing tobacco is every bit as dangerous as smoking it. Smokeless tobacco comes in two forms: snuff and chewing tobacco. Snuff is a fine grain tobacco that often comes in pouches that users pinch or dip between their lower lip and gum. Chewing tobacco comes in shredded, twisted, or bricked tobacco leaves that users put

between their cheek and gum. Whether it is snuff or chewing tobacco, you are supposed to let it sit in your mouth and you suck the tobacco juices, spitting often to get rid of the saliva that builds up. This sucking and chewing allows nicotine, which is a drug that you become addicted to, to be absorbed into the bloodstream through the tissues in your mouth. It's definitely a slow poison, which you are injecting unto yourself by choice.

The use of chewing tobacco is reaching dangerously endemic levels in India. Students, professionals, taxi drivers, young and old - all take it. A recent survey suggests nearly 70% of college students in several Indian cities are addicted to chewing tobacco. Why not? If there aren't enough fathers to stand as role models, who can help the next generation? Chewing tobacco is consumed in India in the form of pan, *guthka*, *mawa*, *zarda* etc. - all of which contain tobacco, and many other harmful components.

The immediate effects can disrupt your social life - bad breath and yellowish brown stains on your teeth. You will also get mouth sores - 70% of spit tobacco users have them. But, it gets a lot more serious than that. Consequences of chewing and spitting tobacco are cracking and bleeding lips and gums, receding gums, which can eventually make your teeth fall off, increased and irregular heartbeats, and high blood pressure, all leading to a greater risk of heart attacks and brain damage (from a stroke). Oral cancer means cancer of the mouth and can happen in the lips, the floor of the mouth, the roof of the mouth,

the tongue, the cheeks, or the gums. It's been medically proved that long-time use of chewing tobacco can lead to cancer. But cancer from chewing tobacco doesn't just occur in the mouth. Some of the cancer-causing agents in the tobacco can get into the lining of your stomach, your oesophagus, and into your bladder.

Sean Marsee was a very popular and respected athlete at his school in Ada, Oklahoma. A fierce competitor, Sean had won 28 medals at high school track meets in his career. Needless to say, he was in near-perfect physical shape. He didn't smoke or drink, but Sean was frequently chewing tobacco and snuff. Starting at age 12, Sean began to chew habitually. In truth, of course, it wasn't a habit - it was an addiction. His mother explained how hazardous tobacco was for him, but Sean refused to believe her. He pointed out to his mother how high-profile athletes both used and marketed smokeless tobacco. If they had tobacco, how could it be dangerous? One day however everything changed. Sean came home and told his mother that his tongue hurts. He then showed her a red sore, the size of a half-dollar on his tongue, with a hard white core. In months, a newly, a newly swollen lymph node was found in Sean's neck - a discouraging sign that the cancer had spread. Sean's mouth sore had now led to neck surgery. When it was recommended to the 18-year old that he had to undergo surgery to remove the lower jaw on the right side along with all lymph nodes, muscles, and blood vessels except his artery, Sean started having severe headaches, and a scan revealed that the cancer had

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“**Mouth cancer is one of the fastest spreading cancers. Doctors consider it an aggressive form of the disease. Chewing smokeless tobacco can eventually rip apart your body and kill you. It's that simple really. There's no such thing as a safe tobacco product.**”

spread around the bottom of his brain and down his back. When Sean became unable to speak, a friend asked him if there was anything he wanted to tell other young athletes. Sean took a pencil and wrote, “Don't dip snuff.”

William Robert Tuttle was a centre fielder for three teams during his baseball career. Tuttle chewed tobacco for most of his career. Thirty-eight years after the end of his baseball career, Tuttle had a more ominous bulge in his cheek - a huge tumour that was so big that it came through his cheek and extended through his skin. Doctors removed the tumour, along with much of Tuttle's face. Chewing tobacco as a young man had cost him his jawbone, his right cheekbone, a lot of his teeth and gum line, and his taste buds. During the last years of his life, Tuttle was facially disfigured. He travelled widely as a public speaker warning major league players of the dangers of chewing tobacco. Cancer caused by his chewing habit finally claimed him in 1998, but Tuttle spent the last years of his life

trying to steer young people, as well as grown up athletes, away from smokeless tobacco.

I know your mind must be thinking I don't chew so much. Let me warn you, every habit starts small. At the beginning everything looks small, till one day it becomes an addiction. Just because you don't have any noticeable side effects from using smokeless tobacco, it doesn't mean you won't have any in the future. Often, by the time the signs are noticeable, it's too late... too late to reverse it. Mouth cancer is very hard to cure and can spread rapidly throughout the body. Mouth cancer is one of the fastest spreading cancers. Doctors consider it an

aggressive form of the disease. Chewing smokeless tobacco can eventually rip apart your body and kill you. It's that simple really. There's no such thing as a safe tobacco product. Chewing tobacco presents the same health risks as cigarettes do.

Most things you buy in the market have guarantees. Toasters and tea makers, mixers and geysers come with a piece of paper promising that if there's any fault, your machine will be repaired or you will get a brand new one. But your body doesn't come with any guarantee.

Peer pressure can be hard to handle sometimes, but the consequences of smokeless tobacco are even worse, if it happens. All habits start very small, but they don't end small. Tell yourself and friends that it can destroy you. Just say no and say it in a firm and confident voice. Appear to be busy, deep in thought or distracted. Make an excuse, such as homework, chores or helping your parents.

Unfortunately, quitting is a lot easier said than done. But you can stop the habit for your sake and for the sake of your near and dear ones. Leave nicotine or dig your own grave? The choice is yours.

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