

# Teens and Smoking: A Toxic Addiction



It's much easier to not start smoking than to quit. That's because nicotine, a chemical in tobacco, is as addictive as cocaine or heroin. Being addicted is like being chained to your cigarettes. You get cravings for smoking that you can't control. You need to have your cigarettes with you all the time. Think about this: Have you ever seen people smoking outside in the rain or cold? They don't do that because it's fun. They do it because they're addicted.

## One package, many poisons

Just one cigarette contains thousands of chemicals. Below are a few of the things you breathe in when you smoke.

- Cyanide, a deadly poison
- Ammonia, used to clean toilet bowls
- Benzene, used to make pesticides
- Toluene, used in fingernail polish remover
- Carbon monoxide, the stuff in car exhaust
- Formaldehyde, used to preserve dead things in jars

## Smoking harms your body and your health

- **Your looks.** Smoking is terrible for your looks. It wrinkles your skin. It makes your teeth and fingers yellow. It also makes your hair, breath, and clothes smell awful. Many people say they wouldn't date a smoker. After all, who wants to kiss someone who smells like an ashtray?
- **Your health.** When you smoke, you put black spots in your lungs. You start coughing up mucus. It strains your heart. You get sick more often. You can have a stroke or heart attack. And in case you haven't heard it a million times, smoking can give you cancer. Not just in your lungs, but on your lips, tongue, and even on your voice box.

## No good reason to start

Below are some reasons people say they start smoking. Ask yourself if they make sense.

- **"I heard it makes you thin."** Is everyone who smokes thin? Of course not! Don't try to lose weight by breathing in poison. If you are trying to lose weight, your healthcare provider can help you with a real strategy.
- **"Smoking relaxes me."** The main thing smoking relaxes is the craving you get from being addicted. Smoking actually narrows blood vessels in your brain. Sound relaxing? There are plenty of healthy ways to unwind that your provider can tell you about.
- **"Smoking seems pretty cool."** Only if you think yellow teeth, bad breath, and coughing up brown mucus are cool.
- **"Smoking doesn't cost that much."** Smoking will use up a lot of your money. In some states, a pack of cigarettes costs \$12.85. If you smoke one pack a day, that equals \$4,690.25 in a year. Over 50 years it will cost you up to \$234,512.50.

- **“My friends smoke.”** If friends offer you a cigarette, tell them you don’t want one. Tell them you’d rather do something else. Tell them your throat is sore. Tell them whatever. But don’t smoke just to fit in.
- **“There’s nothing else to do.”** Really? What about playing sports or shopping for clothes? What about playing music, reading a book, going for a walk, or writing in a journal? Or would you rather spend the day smelling like smoke and hacking up mucus? That’s not cool. It’s gross.

## Get help with quitting

Support is available by going to:

- [www.teen.smokefree.gov](http://www.teen.smokefree.gov); text **QUIT** to 47848
- [www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit\\_smoking/](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/) 800-QUIT-NOW (800-784-8669)
- [www.lung.org/stop-smoking/](http://www.lung.org/stop-smoking/) 800-LUNGUSA (800-586-4872)

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