

tool kit for teen care

Tobacco Use and Adolescent Girls



Who smokes?

- Most teens who smoke regularly are addicted to nicotine.
- Most high-school seniors who smoke and think they won't be smoking in 5 years are wrong—in fact, most will increase the amount of cigarettes they smoke.
- Although it's true that most girls don't smoke, the percentage of girls who do smoke increased in the early 1990s but leveled in the late 1990s, such that among girls:
 - More than one third of high-school students (34.9%) smoke.
 - Rates vary by race and ethnicity: Non-Hispanic white (39.1%) and Hispanic (31.5%) high-school students are significantly more likely to smoke than non-Hispanic black high-school students (17.7%). However, smoking rates among black high-school students have started to increase. Smoking rates are highest among Native American female high-school seniors.
- In general, girls who smoke regularly are more likely to:
 - Have no plans to complete a 4-year college program.
 - Belong to families with lower socioeconomic status.
 - Have parents or friends who smoke.
 - Have weaker attachments to parents and family and stronger attachments to peers and friends.
 - Overestimate the number of adults and teenagers who smoke.
 - Are risk takers and rebellious.
 - Have a weaker commitment to school or religion.
 - Smoke to “calm down” or alleviate stress.
 - Smoke to control their body weight.
 - Use smoking to feel mature, independent, sexually desirable, and sociable.
 - Do not know much about the consequences of smoking and the addictiveness of nicotine.

What about smoking while pregnant?

- Pregnant teens are more likely to smoke than pregnant adults, with the highest rates among older teens (18–19 years old) at 19%.
- Smoking during pregnancy increases the risk of having an unsafe pregnancy and an unhealthy baby. Risks to a pregnant smoker include:
 - Ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy that occurs outside of the uterus)—this is very dangerous for the mother.
 - Preterm delivery (giving birth to a baby too soon).
 - Giving birth to a baby of low birth weight with special health care needs.


What short-term health risks do teen smokers face?

- Reduced rate of lung growth and level of lung function.
- Poorer athletic performance and endurance.
- Increased resting heart rates and shortness of breath.
- Coughing, phlegm, and wheezing.

What are some other health risks for teens who smoke into adulthood?

- Weak bones.
- Longer periods of cramping during menstruation.
- Increased abnormal vaginal bleeding.
- Early menopause.
- Bronchitis, emphysema, and problems from asthma.
- Gastric ulcers.
- Heart and circulatory diseases, including heart attack, coronary heart disease, hardening of the arteries, stroke, high blood pressure (smoking causes 55% of the deaths from heart disease in women younger than 65 years of age).
- Cancer of the lungs, mouth, throat, bladder, liver, colon, rectum, cervix, pancreas, and kidney.





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What are some other downsides of smoking?

- Unattractive personal appearance (bad breath, stained teeth, dull hair, and wrinkles).
- The expense (cost of cigarettes, missing school or work, becoming sick, and increased medical expenses).

What other tobacco products do girls use?

- The use of cigars, pipes, and smokeless tobacco (chewing tobacco and snuff) among women is generally low, but it is increasing. Nearly 10% of female high-school students reported having smoked a cigar in the past 30 days, and 1.3% reported having used smokeless tobacco.
- Use of novel tobacco products, such as bidis (small unfiltered cigarettes with flavors such as chocolate, strawberry and vanilla) and kreteks (clove cigarettes), is still low among teenaged girls, but it is an emerging health problem. Nearly 2% of middle school female students and 3.8% of high-school female students currently are using bidis. Close to 2% of middle school female students and 5.3% of high-school female students reported to be current kretek smokers.
- Cigars, pipes, smokeless tobacco, bidis, and kreteks are NOT safe alternatives to cigarettes. They are also addictive and cause discoloration of the mouth, bad breath and dental disease and long-term effects such as cancers of the mouth, throat, head and neck and other health problems.

Do teens quit smoking cigarettes?

- Nearly 70% of teen smokers aged 12–17 years reported they regretted starting to smoke.
- Most teens try to quit—nearly 75%.
- Most could use some help—nearly 75% of high-school seniors who thought they would not be smoking in 5 years were, in fact, still smoking.

What should a teen do to quit smoking?

- Get support from family, friends, and health care practitioners; participate in a smoking-cessation program; contact one of the organizations on this fact sheet to obtain self-help materials.
- Set a quit date within 2 weeks and get rid of all cigarettes and ashtrays.
- Avoid places where they smoke and keep cigarette substitutes with them (straws, pretzels, or carrots) in order to keep hands and mouth busy.
- Talk to health care practitioner about nicotine replacement products or other pharmacotherapy.
- If a teen has tried to quit but started smoking again, she should keep in mind that it takes an average of four quit attempts to permanently stop, and that with each quit attempt, she is that much closer to being smoke-free.

For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

American Academy of Family Physicians
11400 Tomahawk Creek Parkway
Leawood, KS 66211-2672
Telephone: (913) 906-6000
www.aafp.org
www.tarwars.org

American Cancer Society
1599 Clifton Road, NE
Atlanta, GA 30329
Telephone: (404) 320-3333 or 800-227-2345
www.cancer.org

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
409 12th Street SW
PO Box 96920
Washington, DC 20090-6290
Telephone: (202) 863-2450
Fax: (202) 484-3917
www.acog.org

American Heart Association
7272 Greenville Avenue
Dallas, TX 75231
Telephone: (214) 750-5300 or 800-AHA-USA1
www.americanheart.org

American Lung Association
1740 Broadway
New York, NY 10019
Telephone: (212) 315-8700
www.lungusa.org

American Medical Association
515 North State Street
Chicago, IL 60610
Telephone: (312) 464-5000
www.ama-assn.org

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids
1400 Eye Street, NW, Suite 1200
Washington, DC 20005
Telephone: (202) 296-5469
www.tobaccofreekids.org

Center for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333
Telephone: (404) 639-3311
www.cdc.gov/tobacco/index.htm

National Cancer Institute
31 Center Drive, MSC 2580
Building 31, Room 10A03
Bethesda, MD 20892-2580
Telephone: (301) 435-3848 or 800-4-CANCER

Stop Teenage Addiction to Tobacco
Northeastern University
360 Huntington Avenue, 241 Cushing Hall
Boston, MA 02115
Telephone: (617) 373-7828
Fax: (617) 369-0130