

How do we know smokeless tobacco is a low risk product?

We have no doubt that smoking cigarettes causes a number of cancers and other diseases. What you need to ask yourself is *how* did we discover this truth? It came from epidemiology, the scientific technique of studying huge numbers of people who use (or do not use) tobacco over long periods of time. One can note that tobacco contains a number of potentially harmful substances, but the only thing that matters is whether people who use a particular form of it actually wind up getting sick. This is how we know smoking causes a lot of diseases, but smokeless tobacco *does not*. Exclusive users of smokeless tobacco wind up getting sick (including cancer or dental problems) about as often as non-tobacco users.

What about all those studies that show smokeless tobacco users get diseases?

They suffer from one of two major flaws. First, some of them include people who use products that contain harmful ingredients like slaked lime or betel leaf (e.g., from southeast Asia or India). These people *do* get sick from using them. When they are counted with people who use only western snus, it is falsely claimed that all smokeless tobacco products cause harm. Second, some researchers include certain groups of people who use snus in one study, but different groups of snus users in another. This is a dishonest way to manipulate study results to produce a desired outcome.

Are you saying most of what we're being told about the dangers of smokeless tobacco is wrong?

Yes. Almost everything anti-tobacco health groups are saying about the high risks of smokeless tobacco are deliberately misleading or simply false. They often say smokeless tobacco “contains 28 carcinogens known to cause cancer,” but what they don't tell you is there's little evidence that smokeless tobacco actually *causes* any kind of cancer. In your last breath you exhaled a carcinogen (formaldehyde). Does this mean human breath causes cancer? Of course not.

Regular use of smokeless tobacco causes a rough patch in the mouth called leukoplakia. We're told this condition often develops into oral cancer. What's left out is that there are different kinds of leukoplakia, and it is the kind caused by *smoking* that almost exclusively develops into oral cancer.

These are all misleading distractions from the overwhelming epidemiological evidence that using smokeless tobacco causes cancer or other serious diseases only rarely, about 1% of the risk of smoking.

Why should we take your word for it?

Don't! For several decades Brad Rodu, DDS in oral pathology, has been the leading scientist on the use of smokeless tobacco and health. He delves into the details on the facts and myths about smokeless tobacco. <http://rodutobaccotruth.blogspot.com>

Smokeless Tobacco: Separating Fact from Myth



**The Consumer Advocates
For Smoke-free
Alternatives Association**

<http://www.casaa.org>

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What is smokeless tobacco?

Made from the cured and processed tobacco leaf, smokeless tobacco is placed in the mouth instead of smoked. One of the most popular forms often goes by the Swedish name “snus” (rhymes with “goose”), which is finely minced tobacco leaf either in loose form or contained in small teabag-like pouches.



Also called “dip,” these contain tobacco and often flavoring in addition to inert ingredients designed to keep the tobacco moist and prolong shelf life. Less popular is coarse leaf tobacco that comes in foil pouches, commonly called “chewing tobacco.”

How is smokeless tobacco used?

A small portion (or pouch) is placed between the gum and lip. It's basically parked in this spot until it loses its flavor or the effects of nicotine wear off. The main advantage of using this form of smokeless tobacco is that it requires virtually no spitting if it is placed in the upper lip. The portion or pouch is relatively small and can easily be tucked into an area doesn't generate excess saliva.

Why do people use smokeless tobacco?

There are several reasons people prefer smokeless tobacco over other forms of tobacco like cigarettes and cigars. First, they enjoy the taste. Hundreds of types are available, each with different kinds of tobaccos and flavors. Second, it's convenient. With no need to spit, it can be used virtually anywhere. Third, it's discreet. The portion is often so small no one can tell you're using it. Fourth, smokeless tobacco contains nicotine, a mild stimulant that many people like for much the same reason they like caffeinated coffee or tea. And finally, it is preferred over smoked forms of tobacco because of its dramatically lower risk to health.

Doesn't smokeless tobacco cause mouth cancer, gum disease, tooth loss, and other health problems?

About the worst one can say about smokeless tobacco use is that if it causes these problems, it does so very rarely. Smokeless tobacco users who do not also smoke get oral or other cancers, gum disease, tooth loss, and other diseases about as often as people who use no tobacco at all. This has been known for decades from large long-term studies of smokeless tobacco users in Sweden and the United States. The best scientific estimates show that using western smokeless tobacco products poses about 1% of the health risk of smoking.

Isn't nicotine bad for your health?

Nicotine is one of the most investigated drugs in history. Classified as a mild stimulant, nicotine increases alertness, helps concentration, elevates mood, and in some circumstances can have relaxing effects. Among scientists there is near universal agreement that nicotine is not a particularly harmful drug. It does not cause cancer or contribute to any major diseases in a significant number of people. However, some people should be cautious about using nicotine, like those with heart disease and pregnant women. No drug (including aspirin) is entirely safe to use for everyone.

What about nicotine addiction?

When people use the word *addiction* they are typically referring to some kind of habitual behavior that significantly harms someone's health, well-being, and ability to function in life. It's no secret that smokeless tobacco use can become a *habit*. And all habits (e.g., overeating, gum chewing, nail biting) can sometimes be difficult to break. The mere fact that one *has* a habit is only meaningful in terms of the *consequences* of that habit. Smokeless tobacco users experience virtually none of the problems (e.g., legal, social, vocational, financial) from their habit that are typically caused by addictions to other substances. Are smokeless tobacco users addicted to nicotine? Perhaps so, but it doesn't seem to matter very much if they are.