

# Name makes ‘smokeless’ tobacco seem more safe

“Smokeless” tobacco. How dangerous can it be?

The name makes it sound safe, doesn’t it? It was thought up by the tobacco industry because they wanted it to sound harmless.

A better name for it is “spit” tobacco. Spit tobacco comes in two forms: snuff and chewing tobacco.

Snuff can be either moist or dry. Moist snuff users place a small amount of finely cut tobacco (loose or wrapped in a paper packet that looks like a tea bag) between their gum and cheek. This is sometimes called “dipping.” Dry snuff can be inhaled into the nose.

People who use chewing tobacco place a wad of shredded tobacco leaf in their cheek. No matter what form it comes in, no matter if it’s dipped or chewed, spit tobacco is highly addictive and dangerous.

The tobacco companies, through



**cris lovington**

- prevention center

their advertising and tricks, lead kids to believe spit tobacco is a safe alternative to cigarettes. A lot of kids get addicted to it before they know the facts.

They see the ads and promotions from the tobacco industry linking spit tobacco with sports, rodeos, rock stars and monster trucks. The tobacco industry makes dipping look so cool that kids don’t think about getting addicted or about how dangerous it is. It’s not until later that they begin to realize the damage done.

letes are also the largest marketing source for spit tobacco and are often seen on television using spit tobacco during a game. They exert considerable impact as negative role models for youth.

Most players say they have tried unsuccessfully to quit, according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

When Lenny Dykstra, former Philadelphia Phillies center-fielder, started dipping, he didn’t know how hard it would be to quit. He worries about young people falling into the

same trap as he did.

“They call me ‘Nails’ because they say I’m as tough as nails,” Dykstra said in a public service announcement for Oral Health America National Spit Tobacco Education Program.

“But I’m not tough enough to beat the spit-tobacco habit. Copy my hustle, copy my determination. But don’t copy my spit-tobacco habit.”

Now baseball players like Dykstra are learning that spit tobacco is addictive:

- An average-sized “dip” in the mouth for 30 minutes delivers as much nicotine as 4 cigarettes.
- Users of spit tobacco have the same withdrawal symptoms as smokers when trying to quit.

In addition, spit tobacco causes:

- Tooth Abrasion — Tobacco companies add grit and sand to the

tobacco which scratches teeth and wears away the hard surface or enamel.

- Stained brown teeth and bad breath.
- Gums to pull away from your teeth. This can result in loosened teeth that can be permanently lost.
- Bone loss around the teeth.
- Elevated heart rate.
- Leukoplakia — Appears in the mouth either as a smooth, white patch or as leathery-looking wrinkled skin. Leukoplakia can result in cancer.
- Oral Cancer — All forms of smokeless tobacco contain high amounts of cancer-causing chemicals. They keep users at an increased risk of oral cancer as well as cancer of the pharynx, larynx and esophagus.

When cancer starts, it’s not usually painful. If you use spit tobacco

or have in the past, you should be on the lookout for some of the early signs of oral cancer:

- A sore that does not heal.
- A lump or white patch.
- A prolonged sore throat.
- Difficulty in chewing.
- Restricted movement of the tongue or jaws.
- A feeling of something in the throat.

All tobacco users need regular dental check-ups. Even if you don’t see a problem today, see your doctor or dentist every three months to have your mouth checked. Your chances for a cure are higher if oral cancer is found early.

Unfortunately, some don’t learn that spit tobacco can kill until it’s too late. They don’t know that spit tobacco is like a time bomb. You never know when it will go off. It can strike at any time, at any age.

# People with good emotional health are happy, deal well with others

Emotional health is the way an adult or child feels, thinks, behaves and relates to life and other people. People with good emotional health are generally happy and interested in the world around them.

They have good self-esteem, feel good about themselves. As a result they get along well in school, on the job, and in personal and family relationships.

People are more likely to enjoy good emotional health when they



**high plains mental health**

- plain sense

grow up and live in a loving, supporting home environment. Parents can help children develop good emotional health in several ways:

- Encourage independence along

with responsibility; allow them the opportunity to share in decision-making, and help them learn from their mistakes.

- Teach your child problem-solving, including the consequences of actions.
- Use effective discipline; be fair, consistent and firm. (Do not use physical punishment.)

- Tell your child when they are doing something that you appreciate. Parents are often quick to point out bad behavior. It is also important to notice good behavior.
- Encourage a positive attitude.
- Most important, be a good role model.

Signs of poor emotional health in both children and adults may include a significant change in appetite and/or sleep habits, withdrawal from friends or family, lack of interest in

usual activities, low self-esteem, increased irritability, unreasonable fears and physical problems such as headaches or stomachaches.

Adults and children all go through difficult times throughout their life. Good emotional health results in effective coping skills that help people recover from those times.

If you are concerned about the emotional well-being of a child, family member or friend, talk to your health-care provider, a teacher

or school counselor or a mental health professional.

*Contributed by Karen D. Beery, Consultation and Education Department. The views expressed here are those of the individual writer and should not be considered a replacement for seeking professional help.*

Mail questions to: High Plains Mental Health Center, Plain Sense, Consultation and Education Department, 208 East Seventh, Hays, Kan. 67601.

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