



Helping teens avoid—or quit— smoking

Media and popular culture play an important role in shaping teens' perceptions. Millions of dollars are spent each year advertising tobacco products. Many of these ad campaigns are aimed at attracting new smokers.

Children with parents or older siblings that smoke are more likely to smoke themselves.

Peer pressure is also one of the leading factors in why a teenager makes certain choices. Unfortunately, smoking is sometimes presented to youth as something attractive, fun, sexy, relaxing, and cool. Misconceptions mixed with a desire to fit in can cause healthy teens to make choices that will impact their health in the short and long term. Getting the facts about smoking can help combat these images and misconceptions about smoking.

Misconceptions mixed with a desire to fit in can cause healthy teens to make unhealthy choices that can impact their short and long term health. Getting the facts about smoking can help combat these images and misconceptions about smoking.

Health effects of smoking on young people

Among young people, the short-term health consequences of smoking include respiratory and non-respiratory effects, addiction to nicotine, and the associated risk of other drug use and risky behaviors. Many of the long-term diseases associated with smoking, such as lung cancer, are more likely among those who begin to smoke earlier in life. Tobacco use is addictive for young people and, therefore, quitting is problematic and challenging, even for young users. Long-term health consequences of youth smoking are reinforced by the fact that most young people who smoke regularly continue to smoke throughout adulthood.

- Smoking reduces the rate of lung growth, and smokers have a lower level of lung function than those persons who have never smoked.
- In adults, cigarette smoking causes heart disease, stroke and lung cancer. Studies have shown that early signs of these diseases can be found in adolescents who smoke.
- Smoking hurts young people's physical fitness in terms of both performance and endurance.
- Half of all smokers die prematurely—an average of 10 years earlier than nonsmokers.
- The resting heart rates of young adult smokers are two to three beats per minute faster than nonsmokers.
- Teenage smokers suffer from shortness of breath almost three times as often as teens who don't smoke and produce phlegm more than twice as often as teens who don't smoke.
- Teenage smokers are more likely to have seen a doctor or other health professional for an emotional or psychological complaint.

Warning signs of tobacco use It is sometimes hard to tell if someone is using tobacco. If you suspect that your teen is using tobacco, don't avoid the issue. As the parent, you have every right to express your concern about the child's long-term health. Confront your child and offer support for kicking the habit.

Some signs to look for:

- Wheezing
- Coughing
- Bad breath
- Smelly hair and clothes
- Yellow-stained teeth and fingers
- Frequent colds
- Decreased senses of smell and taste
- Less stamina with sports and athletic activities
- Bleeding gums (smokeless tobacco)
- Frequent mouth sores (smokeless tobacco).

How to help a young person It is important that those who smoke or are considering smoking be aware of the consequences. Any form of tobacco, whether smokeless or in cigarette form, is harmful. (In fact, the FDA has even issued warnings about potential health risks of e-cigarette use, or "vaping.") Tobacco use can stunt growth. Smoking is addictive. It is the leading cause of lung cancer. Smoking may very well be a life-or-death issue. It's vital to make children aware of these facts.

Knowing the harmful effects and risks of smoking is not always enough of an incentive to stop smoking. If your child smokes, be sure they know

how you feel about it. An example of a deterrent is that you can choose to not give an allowance if you feel that the money will go to cigarettes. Be sure to set rules you can enforce, such as no smoking in the house or in the car. Above all, help your child to overcome the addiction. There are many programs and support groups available to help kick the tobacco habit.

Sources: World Health Organization; U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General.

This document is for your information only. It is not meant to give medical advice. It should not be used to replace a visit with a provider. Magellan Health does not endorse other resources that may be mentioned here.