



No matter what you call it—"chew," "snuff," "pinch" or "dip"—smokeless tobacco is anything but harmless. Get the real facts on the following myths.

"Spit tobacco is better than cigarettes."—For smokeless tobacco users, this is one of the most common excuses given and, unfortunately, one that results in severe health risks. In fact, the amount of nicotine in a single container is equal to about 80 cigarettes! This means that spit tobacco is extremely addictive and results in physical and psychological dependency, sometimes after the first dip.

"I can't get cancer from chew."—Not true! Spit tobacco actually contains 28 known carcinogens, such as formaldehyde (used in embalming), nickel, polonium-210 (a radioactive material), benzo(a) pyrene, crotonaldehyde, cadmium (found in batteries) and other chemicals. Since spit tobacco products are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), there's no real way to know what tobacco makers put in their products. The combination of these highly dangerous substances makes users more than 50 times more likely to suffer from oral cancers. An Oral Health America report from 2006 cited oral cancer as one of the most "insidious, deforming cancers in human experience, and 5-year survival rates are low."

If you use smokeless tobacco, you're also at risk for other health problems including tooth decay from the high levels of sugar found in chew, bad breath, gum disease and recession (and eventually tooth loss), leukoplakia (precancerous white mouth lesions) and even heart disease.

"I'm not hurting anyone but myself."—While the personal risks to a smokeless tobacco user are numerous, the effect of using smokeless tobacco has a much larger impact. Young children and teenagers who see their role models using chew during sports, races, rodeos, on TV and at home do so without knowing the health risks and addiction that results.

Ready to quit? Set a quit date, gather a support group and don't give up. Talk to your doctor and your dentist about how you can stop the dependency and enjoy a healthier life.

For information on the TRICARE Dental Program, or to find more "Dental Health 101" tips, visit us online at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com.

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