

# Spit Tobacco – It’s No Game

## What’s in Spit Tobacco?

There are two forms of spit tobacco: chewing tobacco and snuff. Chewing tobacco is usually sold as leaf tobacco (packaged in a pouch) or plug tobacco (in brick form) and both are put between the cheek and gum. Users keep chewing tobacco in their mouths for several hours to get a continuous high from the nicotine in the tobacco.

Snuff is powdered tobacco (usually sold in cans) that is put between the lower lip and the gum. Just a pinch is all that’s needed to release the nicotine, which is then swiftly absorbed into the bloodstream, resulting in a quick high. Sounds ok, right? Not exactly, keep reading...

## What is Spit Tobacco?

Chemicals. Keep in mind that the spit tobacco you or your friends are putting into your mouths contains many chemicals that can have a harmful effect on your health. Here are a few of the ingredients found in spit tobacco:

- Polonium 210 (nuclear waste)
- N-Nitrosamines (cancer-causing)
- Formaldehyde (embalming fluid)
- Nicotine (addictive drug)
- Cadmium (used in car batteries)
- Cyanide
- Arsenic
- Benzene
- Lead (nerve poison)

The chemicals contained in chew or snuff are what make you high. They also make it very hard to quit. Why? Every time you use smokeless tobacco your body adjusts to the amount of tobacco needed to get that high. Then you need a little more tobacco to get the same feeling. You see, your body gets used to the chemicals you give it. Pretty soon you’ll need more smokeless tobacco, more often or you’ll need stronger spit tobacco to reach the same level. This process is called addition.

Some people say spit tobacco is ok because there’s no smoke, like a cigarette has. Don’t believe them. It’s not a safe alternative to smoking. You just move health problems from your lungs to your mouth.

## Physical and Mental Effects

If you use spit tobacco, here’s what you might have to look forward to:

- **Cancer.** Cancer of the mouth (including the lip, tongue, and cheek) and throat. Cancers most frequently occur at the site where tobacco is held in the mouth.
- **Leukoplakia.** Whoa, what’s this? When you hold tobacco in one place in your mouth, your mouth becomes irritated by the tobacco juice. This causes a white, leathery like patch to form, and this is called leukoplakia. These patches can be different in size, shape, and appearance. They are also considered pre-cancerous. **If you find one in your mouth, see your doctor immediately!**
- **Heart Disease.** The constant flow of nicotine into your body causes many side effects including: increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, and sometimes irregular heart beats (this leads to a greater risk of heart attacks and strokes.) Nicotine in the body also causes constricted blood vessels, which can slow down reaction time and cause dizziness – not a good move if you play sports.

- **Gum and Tooth Disease.** Spit tobacco permanently discolors teeth. Chewing tobacco causes halitosis (BAD BREATH). Its direct and repeated contact with the gums causes them to recede, which can cause your teeth to fall out. Spit tobacco contains a lot of sugar, which, when mixed with the plaque on your teeth, forms acid that eats away at tooth enamel, causes cavities, and chronic painful sores.
- **Social Effects.** The really bad breathe, discolored teeth, gunk stuck in your teeth, and constant spitting can have a very negative effect on your social and love life. An even more serious effect of spit tobacco is oral cancer, and the surgery for this could lead to removal of parts of your face, tongue, cheek or lip.

### Early Warning Signs

Check your mouth often, looking closely at the places where you hold the tobacco. See your doctor right away if you have any of the following:

- A sore that bleeds easily and doesn't heal
- A lump or thickening anywhere in your mouth or neck
- Soreness or swelling that doesn't go away
- A red or white patch that doesn't go away
- Trouble chewing, swallowing, or moving your tongue or jaw

Even if you don't find 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.

### Tips To Quit

You've just read the bad news, but there is good news. Even though it is very difficult to quit using spit tobacco, it can be done. Read the following tips to quit for some helpful ideas to kick the habit. Remember, most people don't start chewing on their own, so don't try quitting on your own. Ask for help and positive reinforcement from your support groups (friends, parents, coaches, teachers, whomever...)

1. **Think of reasons why you want to quit.** You may want to quit because;
  - You don't want to risk getting cancer.
  - The people around you find it offensive.
  - You don't like having bad breath after chewing and dipping.
  - You don't want stained teeth or no teeth.
  - You don't like being addicted to nicotine.
  - You want to start leading a healthier life.
2. **Pick a quit date and throw out all your chewing tobacco and snuff.** Tell yourself out loud every day that you're going to quit.
3. **Ask your friends, family, teachers, and coaches to help you kick the habit by giving you support and encouragement.** Tell friends not to offer you smokeless tobacco. You may want to ask a friend to quit with you.
4. **Ask your doctor about a nicotine chewing gum tobacco cessation program.**
5. **Find alternatives to spit tobacco.** A few good examples are sugarless gum, pumpkin or sunflower seeds, apple slices, raisins, or dried fruit.
6. **Find activities to keep your mind off of spit tobacco.** You could ride a bike, talk or write a letter to a friend, work on a hobby, or listen to music. Exercise can help relieve tension caused by quitting.

7. **Remember that everyone is different, so develop a personalized plan that works best for you.** Set realistic goals and achieve them.
8. **Reward yourself.** You could save the money that would have been spent on spit tobacco products and buy something nice for yourself.

### **What is Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery?**

Otolaryngology – head and neck surgery is a specialty concerned with the medical and surgical treatment of the ears, nose, throat and related structures of the head and neck. The specialty encompasses cosmetic facial reconstruction, surgery of benign and malignant tumors of the head and neck, management of patients with loss of hearing and balance, endoscopic examination of air and food passages, and treatment of allergic, sinus, laryngeal, thyroid and esophageal disorders.

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### **Related Links**



**“Spit tobacco has ruined my life.** Every time I turn around, they are putting me in the hospital either to have surgery or some kind of treatment. If I had known then what I know now, I never would have put a dip in my mouth. Spit tobacco seemed harmless, but in reality it was more than I could handle,” says Von Behrens.

National Spit Tobacco Education Program - <http://www.nstep.org/catalogue.pdf>

National Center For Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion - <http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/spit.htm>

American Cancer Society - [http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED\\_10\\_13X\\_Quitting\\_Smokeless\\_Tobacco.asp?sitearea=&level=](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_10_13X_Quitting_Smokeless_Tobacco.asp?sitearea=&level=)

Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids - <http://tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0003.pdf>