

## Hookah Smoking is Unfashionably Unhealthy

It seems like everything comes back into style, if you wait long enough. Sometimes fads coming back can be fun—like the 1960s fashions we are seeing this year. But another fad from the 1960s that is re-emerging has me concerned, and I think it will concern you, too. This fad becoming popular again—especially among our young people—is hookah smoking.

Members of my generation may recall hookahs from the 1960s. These water pipes have been used for hundreds of years in the Middle East and Asia, and they all but disappeared from sight until the last couple of years. These days, the rage is to smoke flavored tobacco in them in a communal setting, often at “hookah bars” like the ones springing up locally.

Here’s the problem: using tobacco in any form is dangerous, period. The myth going around these days is that hookah smoking is somehow less harmful than smoking cigarettes or other tobacco. This is absolutely not true! Although tobacco smoke is passed through water in a hookah, the smoke still contains high levels of toxic compounds, including carbon monoxide, heavy metals and the same cancer-causing chemicals as in cigarettes.

For those who think hookah smoking is a safe way to consumer tobacco, here are some stunning facts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- A study of hookah smokers before smoking and after, found that the addictive drug nicotine is increased 250% after a typical 40-45 minute hookah smoking session.
- In reality, hookah smokers inhale 100-200 times the volume of smoke inhaled with a single cigarette.
- Hookah smokers are at risk for the same kinds of diseases as caused by cigarette smoking, including oral cancer, esophageal and gastric cancer, lung cancer, reduced pulmonary function and decreased fertility.
- Secondhand smoke from hookahs poses a serious threat for non-smokers.

In addition to the risks associated with tobacco itself, hookah smoking carries another risk not associated so much with cigarette smoking: disease transmission. Since hookah involves sharing of mouthpieces, or at least inhaling smoke through the same water vessel, hookah users are at risk for diseases such as herpes, tuberculosis, hepatitis and basically any disease that can be transmitted person to person.

I mentioned this dangerous practice is spreading among young people. Remember that despite the impact of movies, music, and TV, parents can be **THE GREATEST INFLUENCE** in their kids' lives.

**To keep your children tobacco-free, the CDC recommends:**

- Talk directly to your children about the risks of tobacco use; if friends or relatives suffer with or died from tobacco-related illnesses, let your kids know. Let them know, for instance, that smoking strains the heart, damages the lungs, and can cause a lot of other problems, including cancer. Also mention what it can do to appearance: making hair and clothes stink, causing bad breath, and staining teeth and fingernails.
- If you use tobacco, you can still make a difference. Your best move, of course, is to try to quit. Meanwhile, don't use tobacco around your children, don't offer it to them, and don't leave it where they can easily get it.

I hope the information I offer here will help you or your child from being attracted to this dangerous practice. But if you or someone you care about needs help quitting tobacco—of any kind—try these resources:

- **For adults who want to quit tobacco:** Call the Colorado Quitline, (800) QUIT NOW (784-8669)
- Quitline offers free tobacco cessation services and a free supply of the patch to anyone in the state.
- **For those under 18:** Free text-messaging service to quit using tobacco at [www.FixNixer.com](http://www.FixNixer.com).

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