

THE TRUTH ABOUT SPIT TOBACCO

What is spit tobacco?

Spit tobacco is a mixture of tobacco, nicotine, sweeteners, abrasives, salts and chemicals. Spit tobacco comes in two basic forms:

- Chew is a leafy tobacco sold in pouches. Plug tobacco, which is sold in brick form, is also a form of chew.
- Snuff is finely ground tobacco in powder form that is sold in small tins. Some people sniff it, but the more commonly used form is moist snuff, which is held between the cheek and gum.

Who uses spit tobacco?

Spit tobacco use is higher in the Prairies than in the rest of Canada. Athletes, Aboriginal people and rural males are the groups who use spit tobacco the most. Most spit tobacco users start around age nine or ten. Spit tobacco products are often flavoured with licorice, cherry, mint or wintergreen, and sweetened with molasses or sugar – flavours that are appealing to children.

Can using spit tobacco harm my health?

Spit tobacco has over 3,000 chemicals, including 28 known carcinogens.

Spit tobacco is not a safe substitute for cigarettes and can harm your health in many ways.

- You can develop cancer of the mouth (lip, tongue, and cheek, floor and roof of the mouth) and throat.
- Leukoplakia (white, leathery sores) may develop where tobacco is held in the mouth, such as the cheeks, gums or tongue. The longer you use spit tobacco, the more likely you are to get sores. These sores can turn into cancer of the mouth.
- You may experience increased heart rate, higher blood pressure and irregular heartbeats.
- You can become addicted to nicotine. Spit tobacco is addictive because it contains the drug nicotine. In fact, spit tobacco contains more nicotine than cigarettes do.
- Constricted blood vessels (caused by the nicotine) can slow your reaction time and cause dizziness. Not a good thing if you play sports or are working in a dangerous environment.
- You can develop tooth and gum disease including cavities, lost teeth, bad breath and painful sores. Using spit tobacco can cause bone loss around teeth and create worn spots or abrasions on the tooth surface. Gums injured from the chemicals in spit tobacco will pull away from your teeth, leaving them sensitive to hot and cold. This kind of damage is permanent.

What does spit tobacco cost?

Spit tobacco is expensive. Add up how much money you spend on spit tobacco every week. Multiply that by 52, and you will see how much money you can save in one year by quitting. Just think of what you could buy with the money you save!

Why is it hard to quit using spit tobacco?

IT'S PHYSICALLY ADDICTIVE. Spit tobacco contains nicotine. Nicotine is an addictive drug that can change the way you think, act and feel. If you use spit tobacco, you will become addicted to the “buzz”

or “high” it gives you. Over time, you will have to use more and more to achieve the same feeling. One can of snuff per day delivers as much nicotine as 60 cigarettes.

IT’S A LEARNED BEHAVIOUR. Maybe you’ve become accustomed to using spit tobacco when you are with certain friends or in certain situations. You may find it hard not to use spit tobacco during certain activities, for example, at a sporting event, in a bar or while watching television.

The good news is that any learned behaviour can be unlearned. You can successfully quit.

Are you thinking about quitting?

Several studies have shown that over half of spit tobacco users would like to quit. There is no one right way to quit, but there are four key elements to quitting successfully:

- deciding to quit
- setting a date and choosing a plan for quitting that works for you
- finding a way to deal with withdrawal symptoms
- staying off spit tobacco

What follows are six steps to help you quit successfully.

STEP 1: Deciding to quit

It’s important for you to know why you are quitting. Start by making a list of reasons why you want to quit.

You may want to quit because

- you don’t want to get cancer
- you don’t like having bad breath and yellow teeth
- you want to have more energy and better health
- you don’t like being addicted to nicotine
- you want to be in control of your life

Write out your own list and put it where you can look at it often. This will help to remind you why you’ve decided to quit using spit tobacco.

STEP 2: Set a date to quit

It’s important to make a plan for quitting. Set a date one or two weeks ahead, and plan to quit on that day. Stock up on things you can substitute for spit tobacco when cravings hit, such as sunflower seeds, sugarless chewing gum, hard candies and beef jerky. Develop plans to help you deal with high-risk situations – places and times where you might have used spit tobacco in the past. You may decide to avoid certain friends or situations while you are trying to quit.

STEP 3: See your doctor

It’s a good idea to get an oral exam by a health professional. You may also want to ask your doctor about nicotine replacement therapies. It’s important to talk to your doctor about possible side effects before using any of these medications. Your doctor can help you to decide whether nicotine

replacement is right for you. Your doctor may also be able to recommend other support programs to help you quit.

STEP 4: Start a new routine

You may want to consider tapering off your use of spit tobacco the week before your actual quit day.

Here are some tips:

- Cut back on the number of dips you take each day.
- Practise using your gum or sunflower seeds as a substitute for spit tobacco when you get cravings.
- Pay attention to any patterns in the places and times you experience cravings. Practise finding other things to do during those times.

STEP 5: What to do on quitting day

Congratulations! You are on your way to a healthier life. Throw out all tobacco products. Exercise and drink lots of water. Use your oral substitutes when cravings hit. If nicotine replacement therapy is part of your quitting plan, be sure to use it as directed by your health professional.

STEP 6: Staying free of spit tobacco

The first two weeks after your quit day will probably be the toughest. Keep reminding yourself why you quit, and when cravings hit, try to distract yourself until they pass. Be sure to reward yourself! Quitting is hard, and you deserve to treat yourself well. Take the money you would have spent on tobacco and use it to buy yourself a present or do something you enjoy.

What if I slip up and start using spit tobacco again?

Don't feel discouraged! A slip-up doesn't mean that you have failed. For some people, relapse can be a natural part of the quitting process. Relapses are an opportunity to learn from your experiences, figure out what went wrong, create new plans to deal with high-risk situations, and take action again. Choose to learn from your slip. Quitting is possible. Keep working toward your goal to be tobacco-free.