



Let's
Talk
About...

Smoking and Youth

Smoking cigarettes has many health risks for youth. The younger you are when you start smoking, the more complications it can cause throughout your life, and this is why smoking among youth is a serious issue.

Youth who start smoking before the age of 21 have a difficult time quitting, and teens who smoke are also more likely to start using alcohol and drugs. By comparison, youth who do not use tobacco or smoke before the age of 18 will most likely never start.

Why do youth start smoking?

Youth start smoking for many different reasons. One of the most common reasons young people, particularly girls, start smoking is peer influence. Youth who smoke are more likely to encourage their friends to start smoking, and they do so in order to please their friends, and to avoid alienation and bullying. Youth who are pressured by their peers to start smoking should talk to their parents, teachers or a guidance counsellor for help and support.

Another influencing factor for youth is the use of cigarettes among adults in their life. When youth

see their parents, adults and other family members smoking, they can be more likely to take up smoking themselves because they view it as a normal, acceptable behaviour. Some youth start smoking to cope with – and relieve – stress. Just like adults, youth can use smoking as a mechanism to deal with stressful situations. The nicotine in cigarettes activates the pleasure areas in the brain and stimulates positive feelings, which can enhance the instant sensation of relaxation, calmness and pleasant thoughts.

There is also influence from television and advertisements that can contribute to youth smoking. Marketing campaigns are often targeted towards youth because they are more likely to become regular smokers if they start at an early age. When youth see actors smoking in television shows and films, they may start smoking to try to be more like their role models.

What are the health effects of smoking among youth?

Early signs of heart disease and stroke can be found in youth who smoke. The health consequences of smoking among youth include poor physical fitness (both performance and endurance), rapid heart rate, shortness of breath and an increased risk of lung cancer. Youth smokers are more likely to have visited a doctor or other health professional for an emotional or psychological complaint. Risky behaviours such as fighting and having unprotected sex are more common among youth who smoke.

For more information and support, visit albertaquits.ca or call 1-866-710-QUIT (7848).