



Let's
Talk
About...

Spit Tobacco

What is spit tobacco?

Spit tobacco is a mixture of tobacco, nicotine, sweeteners, abrasives, salts and chemicals. It comes in two main forms: chew, which is a leafy tobacco product that is sold in pouches, and snuff, which is a finely ground tobacco powder that is sold in small tins. (Plug tobacco, which comes in the form of a brick, is a kind of chew.) Spit tobacco contains more than 3,000 different chemicals, including 28 known carcinogens. It is highly addictive.

Spit tobacco is often described by the tobacco industry as “smokeless tobacco,” in part to imply that the product may be less harmful and in part to avoid the negative connotations of “spit” and “chew.” Nevertheless, spit tobacco and smokeless tobacco refer to the same thing.

Prevalence

According to Health Canada, approximately 8% of Canadians aged 15 years and up have tried spit tobacco as of 2013. This includes 6% of 15 to 19 year olds, and 10% of 20 to 24 year olds.

As of 2013, less than 1% of Canadians aged 15 years and up reported using spit tobacco within the past 30 days, including 1% of youth aged 15–19 years and 1% of young adults aged 20–24.

Myths and misconceptions

Some people believe that spit tobacco is a safe alternative to smoking. This is not true. Spit tobacco is still tobacco. It may not produce smoke, but spit tobacco still contains many chemicals and known carcinogens.

Others believe that the negative health effects of using spit tobacco can be offset by good oral care (e.g., regularly brushing and flossing). This is also not true. There is no evidence that oral care can reverse the damage that is done to a person's teeth and gums from using spit tobacco.

Finally, there is a conception that spit tobacco is commonly used by athletes (especially baseball players), or that it improves a person's athletic ability. Neither of these things is true. Using spit tobacco increases your heart rate and blood pressure, which puts added stress on your heart and does not make you a better athlete. Meanwhile, a majority of major league baseball players (70%) do not use spit tobacco at all.

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



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