



**Let's
Talk
About...**

Hookah

You may be hearing a lot about hookah, or waterpipe smoking (it's also called nargile or shisha). Traditionally used by elderly men in India, Africa, Persia, and Middle Eastern countries, today hookah is found in restaurants and hookah bars across Alberta.

You may also hear that it's safe, but that's not true. Research tells us that it's not a safe alternative to cigarette smoking. Often described as herbal and advertised as tobacco-free, there are many messages about this product that are misleading.

What is hookah?

Traditional hookah has been used to smoke wet tobacco (tobacco mixed with drops of water) and sometimes mixed with glycerin and/or honey. Over the last 20 years, hookah has become commercialized and flavouring has been added to most products to make it more appealing.

Products smoked, using hookah, have varying amounts of nicotine. Sometimes hookah is marketed as "washed." This doesn't affect the nicotine level or make it safer. While products smoked in hookah are sometimes tobacco-free "herbal," testing shows that even products that say tobacco-free may have tobacco (and therefore nicotine) in it. Nicotine is a very addictive drug. Once exposed to nicotine, it can be hard for people to stop using without having the unpleasant symptoms.



Is hookah safe?

Anytime a product is burned, harmful chemicals are released. Chemicals in smoke from hookah products, both "tobacco and herbal," have been linked to diseases that are usually seen when you smoke cigarettes, such as cancer, heart disease, lung disease, and complications in pregnancy. In fact, the World Health Organization reported that a hookah user may inhale as much smoke in a one-hour session as someone who inhaled 100 or more cigarettes!

A lot of people believe that hookah is safer than other tobacco products because of the water in the base of the pipe. Again, research tells us that this isn't true. The water doesn't act as a filter for tar and for other chemicals.

Burning hookah, including hookah that is tobacco-free, still creates cancer-causing chemicals. In fact, both the first-hand and second-hand smoke produced by herbal shisha contained these known cancer-causing agents at levels equal to or greater than that of tobacco products. That means that people who are around the hookah smoke, including those who work in hookah bars, are at risk of the health problems seen from being exposed to the second-hand smoke.

Another concern is about sharing the mouthpiece. Diseases like herpes and other communicable diseases can also be spread because people are sharing the same mouthpiece.

For more information and support, visit albertaquits.ca.



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