

TOBACCO AND SMOKING

Tobacco has been in use in many nations for hundreds of years. When the Spanish seaman Christopher Columbus sailed across the Atlantic Ocean in the year 1492 A.D., he really was hoping to find a short route to India, “The Land of Golden Glory and Unimaginable Riches”. Fortunately or unfortunately he landed in America. That is why the natives of America are still called Red-Indians! Columbus found that those native people were smoking tobacco wrapped in leaf. The locals thought that tobacco had some medicinal power! Seamen returning to Europe from Americas used to bring this tobacco with them as an Imported Luxury! They used to present this to Kings and Knights. French Ambassador John Nicot brought this to France and presented it to the King of France in 16th century. Later on to honor (?) the memory of Nicot, tobacco’s scientific name was kept as genus Nicotinia! Now Nicotine has become a bad word because of the bad effects of smoking have come to light.

King James I of England issued a “Condemnation of Tobacco” by a Royal Decree in the year 1604. Possibly some bad effects of tobacco might have come to light even in those early days. The tobacco plantations were started in Spain, Portugal and other parts of Europe soon after Columbus imported this miracle plant from Americas. Tobacco seeds are very small and in 10 grams (two teaspoon), there could be nearly a million (10 Lakh) seeds. The European colonists soon took the plantations to Africa, Mexico, America, India and China. Currently China is the largest producer of Tobacco.

We do not exactly know when tobacco cultivation started in India. Ancient Ayurvedic texts such as *Sushrut Sdamhita* and *Vagbhat* do not have any mention about tobacco. *Nighantu Ratnakar*, an Ayurvedic book written around the year 1850 A.D. has first written about properties of tobacco. Tobacco was named as *Tamrakoota* in Sanskrit and *Tamakhu* in Marathi and other local languages. It appears that tobacco was brought to India by Europeans soon after it was cultivated in Europe. Ayurved describes tobacco as *Pittal* (increasing body heat), *Ushna* (hot), *Teekhna* (sharp), *mood* elevating and in large doses leading to delusions. It was medicinally used to induce vomiting and diarrhea. It was locally applied for tooth diseases and to treat snakebites. Now India is one of the leading producer of Tobacco.

In olden days, tobacco leaves were powdered and wrapped in leaves rolled for smoking purpose like Bidis. Cigars and Pipes were initial methods for smoker's pleasure. Soon Cigarette machines were developed in America and it was the start of the Cigarette Industry. Tobacco was also used as snuff (Tapkir) to smell through nose, Jarda- powder to be kept in mouth or as Gutka to be eaten with Paan-Massala. Some people apply Tobacco Mishri as tooth powder. Bidis are still commonly used in India.

Tobacco is habit forming. Most habitual users derive some relaxation and exciting stimulation from using tobacco products. These people develop addiction. Nicotine, the main alkaloid chemical in tobacco leads to addiction because of these pleasing effects. Initially this addiction appears affordable even by poor hard working people because of very low price. These poor manual workers easily fall for this cheap habit, which can help them continue to work and earn.

As the years went by, harmful effects of tobacco products started to be noticed. Many studies were done on tobacco. Tobacco contains more than 4000 chemicals out of which 60 are found to be dangerous to health. Many of these substances are collectively known as Tar. Tar has been shown to produce cancer in animals and humans. These chemicals produce chronic irritation and inflammation in body. After many years of such irritation, exposed cells develop mutations and grow without any control. This is how cancer starts.

Nicotine is the most dangerous chemical yet found in tobacco. It is an alkaloid organic chemical that has been extensively studied on animals and people. Using tobacco over many years has proved to increase the risk for cancer, heart diseases and lung diseases. A chronic smoker of cigarettes has 20 times more risk of getting lung cancer than a person who never smoked. Similarly other cancers, especially cancers of mouth, throat, food-pipe, pancreas and bladder are shown to be related to long term use of tobacco.

When tobacco is burnt during smoking, it liberates Carbon Monoxide, a poisonous gas. This gas interferes with oxygen in lung and blood becomes impure. This gas also combines with healthy hemoglobin in blood making it harmful for body. Body does not enough oxygen which is so important for energy.

In the year 1964, the American Government published the facts about dangers of smoking and

advised the people to quit smoking. More than 40 million (4 Crores) Americans have quit smoking in last 4 decades. For some people it is too hard to stop smoking. They may be badly addicted or may not have the will power to quit smoking. One argument of such people is that “Even people who do not smoke get cancer!” It may be so but the fact is if you smoke, your chances of getting cancer are much higher! If a smoker quits smoking in time, he or she can reduce the risk of getting cancer to a great extent.

Besides cancer, tobacco can also increase risk for heart diseases and lung diseases. Tobacco constricts blood vessels and therefore blood supply to various organs is reduced. A smoker can get high blood pressure. Heart attacks, angina chest pains, lung infections, bronchitis, and chronic cough are other common diseases. It might lead to lung cancer if smoking is not stopped in time. People using pipes and cigars do not inhale the smoke deep in lungs. The smoke stays in mouth and throat. However, the chemical poisons act on the lining of mouth, lips, throat and nose. Cancers of these areas are commonly seen in pipe and cigar smokers.

People eating tobacco as Jarda, Gutka, Mishri etc are at risk of developing cancer in mouth, lips, gums, throat, and food-pipe. When the poisonous chemicals circulate in blood, these can cause many diseases of heart, lungs, muscles, stomach etc. Eventually cancers could develop in internal organs like pancreas, bladder etc.

If a woman is a smoker, during pregnancy her unborn child is also subjected to poisonous effects of tobacco. The chemicals circulate in the blood of pregnant women and can easily enter the body of the unborn child in the uterus. This innocent child after birth can develop many diseases due to bad habits of the mother! It is important that women who wish to be pregnant should quit use of tobacco if they care for the welfare of their children.

It is very important to be aware of the dangers of tobacco. Most people take up to smoking in young age due to bad company of friends. Attractive advertisements showing beautiful girls admiring handsome smokers further tempt you take up to this habit. You are made to believe that if you smoke, beautiful girls will run after you. You can ride horses, go to picnics or sail in the boats with your beautiful friends. It is a false suggestion of happiness. Things do not happen like this in the real world, where cancer, heart diseases and bronchitis become your friends rather than the dream girls shown in the advertisements. All the teenagers and school children should know these facts and never pick up this bad habit. Say “NO” to Cigarettes, Bidis, Jarda,

Gutka, Tapkir and all similar addiction. You are not a coward to say NO to bad habits. Do not bother about your friends (?) who tease you if you refuse tobacco. Such friends are not worth keeping!

Even if you do not smoke, the smoke produced by smokers near you is also harmful since you breathe the same air. This is called as Passive Smoking. Such indirect smoke can also cause many health problems. Therefore, if any of your friends or relatives is using tobacco, be brave and tell them to stop tobacco. You will be doing great service to the people around you. Quitting tobacco would give good health, save money and make you a better person.

How To Quit Tobacco & Smoking?

It is not difficult for most tobacco users to quit these habits. Only few persons get really addicted to tobacco and for this group it is hard to quit. The most important is your WILL POWER to help yourself. You should first understand the bad effects of tobacco, the damage it is doing to your body, your family, your friends and above all your pocket! Once you realize this, JUST GIVE UP SMOKING. Throw away your cigarette packets with match-boxes. Talk to your good friends, wife, parents, sons and daughters who will support you for this good deed. Think it as victory of virtue over vice. Persist in your decision. Do not go back to the bad habit.

If you are not able to quit smoking just like that, there are other ways. Smokers become addict to the nicotine, which temporarily produce pleasing effects on your body and mind. Slowly reduce the number of cigarettes you smoke every day. Every new day, reduce the number of cigarettes by one or two till you come to zero. This way the body slowly loses the addiction of nicotine. This method is called as Nicotine fading. This method works for some but many persons with weak mind easily go back to smoking.

Hypnosis is another method being tried for smoking cessation. Here, you join a group and become hypnotized by a hypno-therapist. Your subconscious mind is given the instructions to quit smoking. When you come out of hypnosis, the powerful subconscious mind will direct you not to go back to smoking. Some people treat themselves by Self-Hypnosis. In any case, you have to consult a competent hypno-therapist for this treatment.

Once you are able to quit smoking for few days, you should continue your efforts to resist smoking. This is called Relapse Prevention, for which you should take advise of your doctor or social worker. Remember, Self Control is the most important tool you have in your hands.

Drug Therapy

If you are unable to quit smoking by own will power or by hypnosis, you might have to see a doctor to get treatment in this matter. Addicted people are unable to quit smoking because of good feeling from nicotine in their blood. Here Doctors can prescribe a Nicotine Chewing Gum or Nicotine Patch for application on your skin. This method will supply some nicotine to you without smoking and your urge to smoke will stop. This is a long course that also needs your co-operation. Some doctors might prescribe drugs like Clonidine which block nicotine in your body. Sometimes antidepressant drugs are given to smokers who feel depressed without smoking. All these treatments have to be taken under medical supervision in proper clinics.

Benefits of Quitting Smoking

1. Within 24 hours: Blood pressure and pulse start returning to normal levels. Oxygen levels in blood increase and Carbon Monoxide poisonous levels decrease.
2. Within 48 hours: Nicotine levels in blood can not be detected and sense of smell and taste improves.
3. Within 72 hours: Breathing becomes easier, energy increases.
4. Within 3 months: Blood Circulation improves. You can walk better without cramps.
5. Within 6 to 9 months: Reduction in bronchitis, breathlessness and smokers cough.
6. Within 5 years: Risk of Heart Diseases and Cancer is reduced to great extent.
7. If you are a woman smoker, quitting smoking before you become pregnant will give a healthier new baby.

8. You would save a lot of money that can be used for better things in life.

9. You would be more liked by your family and friends.

Conclusion

Use of tobacco is dangerous for health. Smoking can cause heart disease, lung disease, bronchitis and even lung cancer. Eating or chewing tobacco can lead to cancer in lips, mouth, throat and food-pipe. A smoker smells bad and is disliked by the people nearby. Not knowing the dangers of tobacco, most people pick up these bad habits in young age because of pressure from friends. You should make every effort not to pick up this bad habit and quit it if are already using tobacco. Persuade your friends and family members to quit tobacco. You will be doing a great service to yourself, your family and to your society. Lokmanya Medical Foundation of Chinchwad is planning to soon develop a QUIT SMOKING CLINIC for the benefit of the large population in Pimpri-Chinchwad area with special attention on students and young workers to save them from this injurious habit.