

Q & A Mindline



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Q **Our son smokes hookah often and justifies it by saying 'it's safer than smoking cigarettes'. Is that true?**

Both hookah (water pipe) and tobacco smoking are very harmful. Hookah smoking is unhealthier and even more addictive than cigarettes.

Let's try and understand it. A cigarette smoker takes 8 to 12 puffs from each cigarette over a period of 5-7 minutes, with each puff delivering about 50-75 ml of smoke. This means they inhale 0.5

litre smoke from a single cigarette. By contrast, hookah smokers inhale more often and for longer periods and inhale as much as a litre of smoke with each puff. Because a hookah session can go on for half an hour or more, smokers take as many as 50 to 200 puffs per session. This means they inhale 10 times as often as the typical cigarette smoker, and each inhalation contains as much as 10 times the amount of smoke obtained from an entire cigarette.

WHO scientists have estimated that by inhaling puffs of greater volume, a hookah smoker would inhale an equivalent of 100 cigarettes or more during a single hookah session. Smoke from a single hookah session contains approximately 36 times the tar, 1.7 times the nicotine and 8.3 times the carbon monoxide as the smoke produced by one cigarette.

Your son's misconception about hookah smoking is shared by many and may act as a gateway to regular cigarette smoking. Hopefully, the above information will demystify his myth and enable him to make the right choice of giving up on tobacco altogether.

Q **Doctor, I am told 'once a smoker always a smoker'. With this in mind I have given up on quitting. I smoke 30 cigarettes a day and it seem to get worse when I drink! What would be your absolute advice on quitting successfully?**

There cannot be an absolute advice as habits vary and so do individual circumstances and personalities. Remember, starting with pessimism will lead to suboptimal effort and reduce chances of success in giving up this dreadful habit. You have failed when you have failed to try. Making an effort

to quit is already a progress in the 'cycle of change'. Quitting smoking may be the best thing you will probably do in your lifetime. So don't quit on quitting!

Tobacco contains nicotine, which is one of the most addictive substances known to mankind, perhaps more so than heroin. Additionally, it also contains carbon monoxide, tar and 60 odd chemicals, which seriously damage health. While it's difficult to quit, it can never be impossible.

Stay with me on the advice. Bringing in change can be hard and motivation is dynamic and subject to enormous fluctuation. So, try one day at a time, building on successes of the previous day and/or learning from lack of it.

Write a smoking diary to identify patterns of smoking, especially in times of urge to indulge in 'critical' cigarettes (smoked after meal etc). Choose a day to quit and go for ceremonial burial of cigarette and paraphernalia. Making formal announcement of your intentions to friends and family will force you to stick by it. Designate an anchor (ideally spouse or partner) to encourage, support and push you to achieve your aims. Delay and distract your urges to smoke with juices, healthy snack and mint. Avoid company of smokers and drinking environments initially. Take up exercise to reap the benefit of clearer breathing. More importantly, consider nicotine substitutes like patches, chewing gums or inhalers. Additionally, there are medications to reduce cravings and associated anxiety.

Research suggests that a majority of smokers who try to quit without a specialist's advice and substitutes, relapse to smoking soon afterward.

*Ask your queries at
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