

Q & A Mindline



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Q My father who is 54 years old quit smoking and instead starting chewing *gutka*, as he thinks it is safer than smoking. I think both habits are nasty and would appreciate it, if you can please advise ways to persuade him to quit *gutka* as well.

Quitting smoking may be the best decision your father will ever make. It's one of the nastiest habits and a harmful vice. But substituting one addiction for another, is not a good idea.

It seems like he didn't seek professional guidance and nicotine substitution therapy (like chewing gum or patches), but chose to substitute the body's demand for nicotine (addictive content of tobacco) with chewing tobacco.

Innumerable Indians are addicted to nicotine and live with the illusion that chewing *gutka* or smokeless tobacco is less harmful than smoking. But not many are aware that *gutka* is literally 'a pinch of poison' and an ingredient for severe ailments and slow death. Doctors, especially oncologists, say consumption of *gutka* is more harmful than any other form of tobacco.

Gutka which comprises of paraffin, slaked lime, arecanut and katechu is often sold as a mouth freshener and is laden with many harmful chemicals of which around 40 are cancer causing (carcinogenic) compounds. It is consumed by placing it between the gum and cheeks for gentle chewing and sucking. Hence, when a person consumes *gutka*, the toxic chemical and the mixture gains direct entry into the body's system via the mouth. However, with smoking, only a small percentage of the chemicals reach the lungs and a larger per cent about 80 per cent is exhaled.

I think you need to provide positive reinforcements by telling him, how well he has done by giving up smoking. Also, encourage him to seek professional help (from a psychiatrist) for motivational sessions and consideration of anti-craving medication, alongside substitute therapy with nicotine gums or 24-hour nicotine patches. Nicotine substitution will ease withdrawal features like craving, restlessness and anxiety. He will also be motivated to learn and use the psychological methods to maintain abstinence and sustain an active lifestyle.

Q Do I see a psychiatrist or psychologist for an addictive problem?

Both are an integral part of multi-disciplinary psychiatric service. During the first visit, one should ideally see both, as a part of comprehensive initial assessment and formulation of the nature and extent of the problem, including understanding personality characteristics and coping style.

Seeing a qualified psychiatrist will ensure that all necessary health issues are addressed, and necessary medical investigation (such as blood tests,

ultrasound, CT/MRI, ECG, etc.) are carried out promptly. Many psychiatrists have special interest and training in motivational and cognitive behavioural therapy, therefore they can carry out these interventions in a planned manner to help overcome addiction. Otherwise, input from trained psychologist will enable planning and delivery of therapy sessions to address individual areas of need.

For an effective treatment and therapy program, it is important to receive psychiatric and psychological intervention for best outcome and recovery.

Q Can addiction be treated on an outpatient basis? Or do they require admission to a rehab unit?

It depends on the type of addiction, the severity of dependence and associated medical or psychiatric problems. Besides, successes or failure of previous treatment can dictate the location of treatment and therapy. Importantly, it also depends on individual willingness to engage with necessary treatment and his/her available support network.

Most addictive problems can be on an outpatient basis, provided it is planned and done under professional supervision. Outpatient or clinic based programs allow people to continue their daily routine. Whereas, hospital based or inpatient programs may be restrictive and will not allow individuals to attend work or other important tasks. Equally, many people drink regularly but are functional in their lives, so in such cases, outpatient services help them to learn a sober skill and maintain abstinence.

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