

Don't be lured into an addiction

Some people believe that young teens can't have been using tobacco long enough to become truly addicted. Scientists are learning that's not true.

There is no doubt that regular use of spit tobacco — by people of any age — leads to a physical dependence on nicotine. Even though they do not "light up," spit tobacco users experience a significant amount of nicotine exposure. They can lose control over their own bodies, and might make poor decisions about their health because they are addicted.

Be suspicious of tobacco advertising. Smokeless tobacco is the term preferred by the tobacco industry. It makes tobacco sound safe; it isn't.

Think about your health, and about the people who love you



Sean Marsee before he got ill



Sean Marsee after surgery

Advertising glamorizes tobacco but does not admit health risks, including addiction. The truth is that one can of spit tobacco delivers as much nicotine as 60 cigarettes (that's three packs)! Many tobacco users find that when they want to quit, it is very difficult.

That's what happened to a young man named Sean Marsee, who started using spit tobacco (also called snuff) at the age of 12. By age 18, he developed a sore on his tongue.

Doctors removed part of Sean's tongue, but the cancer spread to his neck.

Despite more disfiguring surgery, Sean died a few months short of his 19th birthday. His mother later said that she tried to talk him out of using snuff, but Sean always reasoned that athletes wouldn't advertise it if it wasn't safe. Sean was wrong.

Spit tobacco is known to cause mouth, lip, and tongue cancers. As the Sean Marsee story shows,

the tragic results of using spit tobacco can take a toll both on the user and on the user's family. Living with cancer (and perhaps dying from it) should be strong motivators to stay away or get away from using tobacco products. If you are hooked, ask your dentist for help.

Control your own decisions — don't let tobacco control you.



Sores, receding gums and tobacco stains often result from using smokeless tobacco.



Gums that have receded leave the roots of teeth exposed and more likely to become decayed or sensitive to extreme temperatures.

Spit tobacco is costly and ugly

There are strong health-related reasons to avoid spit tobacco. But if health concerns alone do not convince you, consider the expense. The amount a user spends each week multiplied by 52 weeks per year undoubtedly adds up to hundreds of dollars. Do the math!

Then consider the most obvious negative consequences spit tobacco can have on your appearance:

- Bad breath
- Dirty, stained teeth (brushing won't make this go away)

Anyone who likes white teeth and fresh breath would rather know and date a non-user. Because of bad breath and yellow teeth (with tooth stains that are permanent), spit tobacco users aren't very kissable. There is no appeal in being with someone who spits a brown liquid that looks bad and smells worse. It's really gross!

If you are tobacco-free, you may enhance the quality of your life

- You may feel better physically.

- You will not dull your sense of taste.
- Your lips, teeth, gums, tongue, throat, and voice box may stay healthier.
- Others will not shun you because you look and smell of tobacco.
- You can stay in control of your own life and health choices — addiction will not control you.
- You can save money.

Damage is tough to treat

Each year, more than 30,000 new cases of mouth and throat cancer are diagnosed. Only half of those diagnosed will live five years or more.

Leathery white patches, called leukoplakia (loo-ko-PLAY-kia), and red sores are common in dippers and chewers and can turn into cancer. Users' gums pull away from their teeth where the tobacco is held. When this happens, the gums usually do not grow back.

Mouth cancers are among the toughest cancers to treat. Early detection is very helpful, however, so if you have white patches, red patches, or sores in your mouth, see your dentist without delay.