

## Kids and Smoking

The health risks of tobacco are well known, but kids and teens continue to smoke and use chewing tobacco. In fact, 90 percent of all adult smokers started when they were kids. Kids might be drawn to smoking and chewing tobacco to look cool, act older, lose weight, seem tough or feel independent.

Smoking can cause cancer and heart and lung disease. Chewing tobacco (smokeless or spit tobacco) can lead to nicotine addiction, oral cancer, gum disease and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, including heart attacks.

### Facts about tobacco

One of the problems with smoking and chewing tobacco is nicotine. Someone can get addicted to nicotine within days of first using it. The nicotine in tobacco can be as addictive as cocaine or heroin. It affects mood as well as the heart, lungs, stomach and nervous system.

Other short-term effects of smoking include coughing and throat irritation. Over time, more serious conditions may develop, including increases in heart rate and blood pressure, bronchitis and emphysema.

Numerous studies indicate that young smokers are more likely to experiment with marijuana, cocaine, heroin or other illicit drugs.

### Prevention tips

- Discuss it in a way that doesn't make kids fear punishment or judgment.
- Keep talking to kids about the dangers of tobacco use over the years. Even the youngest child can understand that smoking is bad for the body.
- Ask what kids find appealing — or unappealing — about smoking. Be a patient listener.
- Compare media images with what happens in reality.
- Encourage kids to get involved in activities that prohibit smoking, such as sports.
- Discuss ways to respond to peer pressure. Your child may feel confident simply saying "no." But also offer alternative responses.
- Emphasize what kids do right rather than wrong. Self-confidence is a child's best protection against peer pressure.
- Encourage kids to walk away from friends who don't respect their reasons for not smoking.
- Establish firm rules that exclude smoking and

chewing tobacco from your house and explain why: Smokers smell bad, look bad, and feel bad and it's bad for everyone's health.

### What to watch for

If you smell smoke on your child's clothing, don't overreact. Ask about it first. Maybe she's been hanging around friends who smoke or just tried one cigarette. Many kids do try smoking but don't go on to become regular smokers.

Additional signs of tobacco use include:

- coughing
- throat irritation
- hoarseness
- bad breath
- decreased athletic performance
- greater susceptibility to colds
- stained teeth and clothing (also signs of chewing tobacco use)
- shortness of breath

### If your child smokes

- Resist lecturing or turning your advice into a sermon.
- Uncover what appeals to your child about smoking and talk about it honestly.
- Many times, kids aren't able to appreciate how their current behaviors can affect their future health. Talk about the immediate downsides to smoking: less money to spend on other pursuits, shortness of breath, bad breath, yellow teeth and smelly clothes.
- Stick to the smoking rules you've set up, and don't let a child smoke at home just to keep the peace.
- If you hear, "I can quit any time I want," ask your child to show you by quitting cold turkey for a week.
- Try not to nag. Ultimately, quitting is the smoker's decision.
- Help your child develop a quitting plan and offer information and resources, and reinforce the decision to quit with praise.
- Stress the natural rewards that come with quitting: freedom from addiction, improved fitness, better athletic performance and improved appearance.
- Encourage a meeting with your doctor, who can be supportive and may have treatment plans.

# Kids and Smoking (continued)

## If you smoke

Kids are quick to observe any contradiction between what their parents say and what they do. If you're a smoker:

- Admit that you made a mistake by starting to smoke and that if you had it to do over, you'd never start.
- Second, quit. It may take a few attempts and the extra help of a program or support group. But your kids will be encouraged as they see you overcome your addiction to tobacco.