Cigar Smoking

Many people view cigar smoking as more sophisticated and less dangerous than cigarette smoking. The traditional cigar is quite large, but today, smaller cigars are much more popular – you can buy them almost anywhere. Except for the brown wrapper, many of these little cigars look just like cigarettes. So when we talk about cigars, we're talking about 2 extremes: on one side is the traditional big cigar, and on the other is the small cigarette-like version. There are also sizes in between.

No matter the size, cigars are tobacco, and they are dangerous to your health. And like cigarettes, cigars give off secondhand smoke, which can fill a room for hours.

Tobacco use is responsible for nearly 1 in 5 deaths in the United States. Tobacco use is an acquired behavior – it's something that people choose to do. This makes smoking the most preventable cause of death in our society.

How are cigars different from cigarettes?

A cigar is defined, for tax purposes, as "any roll of tobacco wrapped in leaf tobacco or in any substance containing tobacco," while a cigarette is "any roll of tobacco wrapped in paper or any substance not containing tobacco." Traditional cigars don't usually have filters, although many of the smaller, more cigarette-like cigars do.

Most cigars are made of a single type of air-cured or dried tobacco. Cigar tobacco leaves are first aged for about a year and then fermented in a multi-step process that can take from 3 to 5 months. Fermentation causes chemical and bacterial reactions that change the tobacco. This is what gives cigars a different taste and smell from cigarettes.

Cigars come in many sizes:

- The smallest, known as *little cigars* or *small cigars*, are about the size of cigarettes. Other than the fact that they are brown and maybe a little longer, they look like cigarettes. They come in flavors like mint, chocolate, or fruit, and many have filters. They are often sold in packs of 20. Most people smoke these small cigars exactly the same as cigarettes.

- Slightly larger cigars are called *cigarillos*, *blunts*, or *cheroots*. They contain more tobacco than little cigars, and are also often flavored. Studies suggest that some

people smoke them more like cigarettes than cigars, inhaling and smoking every day. They look like small versions of traditional tapered cigars, but they can be bought in small packs.

- True *large cigars* may contain more than half an ounce of tobacco – as much as a whole pack of cigarettes. It can take from 1 to 2 hours to smoke a traditional large cigar. Many what are now called "large cigars" are carefully made to meet the legal definition of a large cigar (which is based on weight, not size), even though they're actually quite small. This means they can be called large cigars or in some states, "other tobacco products," which is good for the tobacco companies (see the next section).

When looking at size and weight of small cigars and large cigars compared to cigarettes, legal definitions get very confusing. Since 2009, small cigars have been defined as those that weigh 3 pounds or less per 1,000 cigars. Some of the larger cigarettes can weigh more than 3 pounds per 1,000. Still, any cigar weighing more than 3 pounds per 1,000 is taxed as a "large" cigar, despite being smaller than some cigarettes.

Why so many options?

Cigars that are sold like cigarettes and smoked like cigarettes are another way the tobacco industry has managed to get around federal laws and taxes. For example, cigars that are small in size but meet the legal definition of large cigars (based on weight) are taxed at lower rates than cigarettes and small cigars by state and federal governments. The tobacco industry uses this to their advantage.

Certain combustible tobacco products (those that are burned and smoked) can be sold in packs like cigarettes and be used like cigarettes, but not legally be considered cigarettes. This means they're not subject to US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations related to manufacturing, flavoring, labeling, and marketing. For instance, these products can be flavored, and can be labeled with misleading descriptors like "light" or "low tar." They can be marketed and sold with fewer restrictions and much lower taxes than cigarettes. And the candy flavors and low price makes them more appealing and accessible to young smokers.

While overall data shows that cigarette use has decreased, the use of other combustible tobacco products has increased. So, these low-priced and less-regulated products seem to have led some cigarette smokers to switch to other combustible tobacco products, and cigarette-like cigars are especially popular.

In fact, since the federal tobacco excise tax was increased in 2009, statistics show that large cigar and pipe tobacco use has increased, while cigarette and "little cigar" smoking has decreased. This is the result of a new legal definition of "large cigar" and offering cigarette smokers and curious kids a lower-priced, less regulated tobacco option − cigars.

Are cigars as addictive as cigarettes?

Cigars contain nicotine, the substance in tobacco that addicts people. Cigar smokers who inhale absorb nicotine through their lungs as quickly as cigarette smokers. For those who don't inhale, the nicotine absorbs more slowly through the lining of the mouth. Cigar smoke dissolves more easily in saliva than cigarette smoke. This means cigar smokers can get the desired dose of nicotine without inhaling the smoke directly into their lungs. People who use oral or spit tobacco products absorb nicotine the same way. Nicotine in any form is highly addictive.

Even though people may smoke cigars for different reasons, the fact is, like cigarettes, cigars deliver nicotine. Most full size cigars have as much nicotine as *several* cigarettes. Cigarettes contain an average of about 8 milligrams (mg) of nicotine, but only deliver about 1 to 2 mg of nicotine to the smoker. Many popular brands of larger cigars contain between 100 and 200 mg, or even as many as 444 mg of nicotine. The amount of nicotine a cigar delivers to a smoker can vary a great deal, even among people smoking the same type of cigar. How much nicotine is taken in depends on things like:

- How long the person smokes the cigar
- How many puffs are taken
- Whether the smoker inhales

Given these factors and the large range of cigar sizes, it's almost impossible to make good estimates of the amounts of nicotine larger cigars deliver.

For small cigars, Health Canada estimates that filtered little cigars that are the size and shape of cigarettes contain about the same amount of nicotine as a cigarette. If these are smoked like cigarettes (inhaled), they would be expected to deliver a similar amount of nicotine, but this has not been fully tested.

Who smokes cigars?

Cigar smokers in the past were mainly middle-aged, older men with higher education and income, but most new cigar users today are teens and young adults. In 2012, more high school boys smoked cigars than cigarettes (16.7 vs 16.3%). Looking at all first-time tobacco users, nearly 2.7 million smoked cigars, while 2.3 million smoked cigarettes.

According to 2012 research, about 17% of male and 8% of female high school students had smoked a cigar within the last month, compared to the average of 5% from all ages.

In all, about 13.4 million people age 12 and older smoke cigars.

Cigar smoking is popular in the United States where a "cigar culture" is supported by cigar magazines, shops, and bars or clubs. Many cigar smokers think of themselves as connoisseurs, much like wine experts. They may view cigars as a sophisticated, affordable luxury that represents status and success. Some see cigar smoking as a sign of taste and refinement. This image is fueled in part by the efforts of the tobacco industry to

glamorize cigars, and the willingness of celebrities and athletes to be paid and photographed smoking cigars.

Teenagers and young adults may be particularly open to this kind of cigar marketing. But the proposed link between cigars and success for the most part isn't real. In fact, cigar use is much higher in unemployed adults than in people who work full or part time.

Sales of what are now legally defined as "small cigars" actually decreased by 65% between 2000 and 2011. During that same time, the increase in "large cigar" sales has been dramatic – increasing 233% between 2000 and 2011. Some of the products now classified as "large cigars" are sold in packs of 20, just like cigarettes. Their size, shape, filters, and packaging make them look like cigarettes, except for their color. This shift in official reports of cigar use is mainly due to the tobacco industry making sure that most small cigars now meet the legal definition of large cigars. The new legal definitions of "large cigars" and "small cigars" make it very confusing to read official reports of tobacco use and sales (see the section "How are cigars different from cigarettes?"). More importantly, they allow the tobacco industry to bypass the newer laws and higher taxes that apply to small cigars but not large cigars.

Tobacco companies add strawberry, chocolate, and other sweet flavors to cigars, which appeal to younger smokers not yet accustomed to the taste of tobacco. As of November 2010, such flavors can't be added to cigarettes, but there are no such restrictions on cigars. This may lead to an even greater increase in cigar smoking as tobacco companies take advantage of the lack of regulation of these products. Taxes on cigars are lower than cigarettes, so they are much cheaper in most states. The low cost makes them even more attractive to younger buyers.

See "Why so many options?" in the section called "How are cigars different from cigarettes?" for more on this.

For more information on youth and cigars, see our document *Child and Teen Tobacco Use*.

What kinds of illness and death are caused by smoking cigars?

Regular cigar smoking increases your risk for many cancers, including:

- Lung
- Lip
- Oral cavity (tongue, mouth, and/or throat)
- Esophagus (the tube connecting the mouth to the stomach)
- Larynx (voice box)

Studies have shown that regular cigar smokers are 4 to 10 times more likely to die from cancers of the mouth, larynx, and esophagus than non-smokers. For those who inhale, cigar smoking appears to be linked to death from cancer of the pancreas and bladder, too.

How you smoke and how much you smoke are both important. Cigar smokers may spend an hour smoking one large cigar that can contain as much tobacco as a pack of cigarettes. Smoking more cigars each day or inhaling cigar smoke leads to more exposure and higher risks. The health risks linked to occasional cigar smoking (less than daily) are less clear.

Does inhaling affect the risk of cancer?

Almost all cigarette smokers inhale, but in the past most cigar smokers typically did not. This could be because cigar smoke tends to irritate the eyes, nose, throat, and breathing passages. A new trend among cigar companies is to change the fermenting process to make cigar smoke easier to inhale. This curing and fermenting process enhances the flavor but also increases the levels of harmful ingredients. Many of the smaller cigarette-like cigars have filters, which also makes them easier to inhale.

In those who don’t inhale, tobacco smoke does not reach the lungs in the same amounts as it does in cigarette smokers. As a result, the risk of death from lung cancer for cigar smokers who don’t inhale is not as high as it is for cigarette smokers. Still, it is many times higher than the risk for non-smokers. Keep in mind that even cigar smokers who don’t inhale are still breathing in large amounts of smoke that comes from their mouths and the lit end of the cigar.

Cigars that are about the size of cigarettes are changing the way cigars are smoked and how “cigar” is defined. Researchers have found that when surveying people about cigar use, the use of brand examples helps improve accuracy of the estimates. Some smokers think of smaller cigars as cigarettes, and we know that they tend to smoke them the same way. The health outcomes of this remain to be seen. But we do have some data because cigar smokers who have smoked cigarettes are more likely to inhale.

According to an American Cancer Society study, cigar smokers who inhale have an 11 times greater risk of death from lung cancer than non-smokers. This study also found that cigar smokers who inhale are at increased risk for other types of cancer, too. Compared to non-smokers, cigar smokers who inhale deeply:

- Are 7 times more likely to die from tongue, mouth, and/or throat (oral) cancer
- Are 39 times more likely to die from cancer of the voice box (larynx)
- Face about 3 times the risk of death from cancer of the pancreas
- Face about 4 times the risk of death from bladder cancer

Other health problems caused by smoking

Heart and lung disease

Cigarette smoking is known to increase the risk of lung diseases like emphysema and chronic bronchitis. Cigarette smokers also have twice the risk of dying of heart attacks as do non-smokers. While the link is not quite as strong as with cigarette smoking, cigar smoking (especially for people who inhale) also increases the risk of heart disease and lung diseases, such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

Heart and lung diseases can steal away a person's enjoyment of life long before they cause death. These problems can start when smokers are in their 40s and tend to worsen with age. Smoking-related illness can make it harder for a person to breathe, get around, work, or play.

One long-term study found that men who smoked cigars or pipes lost more than 5 years of being healthy, and then went on to die an average of nearly 5 years earlier compared to non-smokers. It's worth noting that this study did not include people who smoked the newer types of small cigars, which may have even greater health risks.

Other effects on the body

Cigar smoking, like cigarette smoking, is linked to gum disease, where the gums shrink away from the teeth. It also raises the risk that your teeth will fall out.

At least one study has linked cigar smoking to sexual impotence in men (an inability to get an erection, also known as erectile dysfunction).

What about secondhand cigar smoke?

Because cigars contain more tobacco than cigarettes, and because they often burn for much longer, they give off greater amounts of secondhand smoke. This is also known as *environmental tobacco smoke* (ETS) or *passive smoke*. Secondhand smoke includes both the smoke from the end of the burning cigar and the smoke exhaled by the smoker.

All tobacco smoke, whether from cigarettes, pipes, or cigars, is known to cause cancer. In general, secondhand smoke from cigars contains many of the same toxins (poisons) and carcinogens (cancer-causing agents) as cigarette smoke.

Some of the toxins and irritants in cigar smoke include:

- Carbon monoxide
- Nicotine
- Hydrogen cyanide
- Ammonia

Some agents that cause cancer (carcinogens) and can be found in cigar smoke include:

- Benzene
- Aromatic amines (especially carcinogens such as 2-naphthylamine and 4-aminobiphenyl)
- Vinyl chloride
- Ethylene oxide
- Arsenic
- Chromium
- Cadmium
- Nitrosamines
- Polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons
- Volatile aldehydes (including formaldehyde)

Like all tobacco, cigars can also contain radioactive elements, which may add to the cancer risk.

There are some differences between cigar and cigarette smoke, though. These differences are due to the aging and fermenting of cigar tobacco and the fact that the cigar wrapper is not as porous as cigarette paper.

Cigar tobacco has a high concentration of nitrogen compounds (nitrates and nitrites). When the fermented cigar tobacco is smoked, these compounds give off several *tobacco-specific nitrosamines* (TSNAs), some of the most potent cancer-causing substances known. Also, because the cigar wrapper is less porous, the tobacco doesn't burn as completely. The result is a higher concentration of nitrogen oxides, ammonia, carbon monoxide, and tar – all very harmful substances.

Are electronic cigars safe?

The electronic cigarette boom is now spawning sales of other special devices designed to reproduce different types of smoking using vaporized liquids. The electronic cigar (e-cigar) is one of these newer products. E-cigars are designed to look like large cigars, right down to the glowing tip partly covered by fake ash. When the smoker puffs on it, the system delivers a mist of liquid, flavorings, and nicotine that looks something like smoke. Nicotine and other chemicals are absorbed into the mouth or the lungs. The e-cigar is usually sold as a way for a cigar smoker to smoke without the persistent stink of cigar smoke. Unlike e-cigarettes, e-cigars are often wrapped with a real tobacco leaf and are sold as disposable, rather than refillable.

Like e-cigarettes, marketers say that the ingredients are safe, but this means only that they are considered safe to eat. Inhaling a substance is not the same as swallowing it. Like, e-cigarettes, e-cigars are not labeled with their ingredients, so the user doesn't know what's in them. The amount of nicotine and other substances a person gets is also unclear.

E-cigars are designed to deliver nicotine, which is known to be an addictive substance. This strongly suggests that e-cigar use can lead to dependence, unless the user weans him or herself from them. But electronic smoking devices are getting more popular. A CDC survey published in 2013 showed that e-cigarette use in middle school and high school students doubled between 2011 and 2012, with 10% of high school students and 3% of middle school kids using them. Given the popularity of cigars among high school students, it's very possible that e-cigars will be in schools next.

Very little reliable information is available about the e-cigar; safety and long-term health effects are unknown. This is an area where research is badly needed. These new products need to be researched and regulated.

Are there laws regulating cigars?

Cigars have fewer federal regulations than cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products. This, as well as the lower taxes (so they cost less), is a key part of their increasing popularity.

Warnings of proven health risks, much like those required for cigarettes, were added to most cigar ads and packages as of a June 2000. The labels on cigars made by the 7 largest US companies must carry one of these 5 Surgeon General warnings, on a rotating basis:

- Cigar smoking can cause cancers of the mouth and throat, even if you do not inhale.
- Cigar smoking can cause lung cancer and heart disease.
- Tobacco use increases the risk of infertility, stillbirth, and low birth-weight.
- Cigars are not a safe alternative to cigarettes.
- Tobacco smoke increases the risk of lung cancer and heart disease, even in non-smokers.

At this time, cigars are exempt from federal tobacco regulations that limit advertising and restrict underage children from buying cigars. But all 50 states and the District of Columbia have laws that either clearly address children and teens' access to cigars or forbid underage children from buying any tobacco products.

Despite the laws that forbid underage children from buying them, cigars are easy to get. A study done in the year 2000 found more than 140 Internet sites that sold cigars, with almost 1 in 3 having possible youth appeal. Only about 1 out of 4 of these sites clearly banned sales to minors. On about 1 out of 3 sites, cigars could be bought with money orders, cashier's checks, or cash-on-delivery (COD) − options that make it hard to check the age of the buyer. The federal law called the *Prevent All Cigarette Trafficking Act of*

2009 (PACT) sought to ban illegal online sales of cigarette and smokeless tobacco, but specifically exempted cigar sales from its requirements. Again, cigars have less restrictive rules and may be easier to buy online than other forms of tobacco.

Since the mid-1960s, the Federal Trade Commission has overseen a testing program to report the amount of tar, nicotine, and carbon monoxide for most brands of cigarettes. But cigars are not required to go through these tests, and makers of cigars do not have to report such levels to any federal agency.

What you can do

The best thing you can do is never smoke a cigar or use any other form of tobacco. It's also important to avoid all forms of tobacco smoke. Keep your home smoke-free, especially if you have children.

If you want to learn more about the dangers of tobacco smoke, or want to learn more about quitting smoking, please see our *Guide to Quitting Smoking*. You can also call us at 1-800-227-2345 for information and support.

To learn more

More information from your American Cancer Society

Here is more information you might find helpful. You also can order free copies of our documents from our toll-free number, 1-800-227-2345, or read them on our website, www.cancer.org.

If you or someone you care about is trying to quit smoking

Guide to Quitting Smoking (also in Spanish)

Quitting Smoking – Help for Cravings and Tough Situations (also in Spanish)

Helping a Smoker Quit: Do's and Don'ts

For more information on the health effects of tobacco

Questions About Smoking, Tobacco, and Health (also in Spanish)

Child and Teen Tobacco Use (also in Spanish)

Secondhand Smoke (also in Spanish)

Tobacco-Related Cancers Fact Sheet

National organizations and websites*

Along with the American Cancer Society, other sources of information and support include:

QuitNet
Website: www.quitnet.com

> Offers free, cutting edge, online services to people trying to quit tobacco

Nicotine Anonymous (NicA)
Toll-free number: 1-877-879-6422 (1-877-TRY-NICA)
Website: www.nicotine-anonymous.org

> For free information on their 12-step program, meeting schedules, print materials, or information on how to start a group in your area

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Office on Smoking and Health
Free quit support line in each state: 1-800-784-8669 (1-800-QUIT-NOW)
TTY: 1-800-332-8615
Website: www.cdc.gov/tobacco
Quitting help website: www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/how_to_quit/index.htm

> The quit support line offers information on smoking and health as well as help with quitting. Languages and range of services vary by your state of residence

National Cancer Institute
Toll-free tobacco quit line: 1-877-448-7848 (1-877-44U-QUIT) (also in Spanish)
Direct tobacco website: www.smokefree.gov

> Quitting information, quit-smoking guide, and phone counseling are offered, as well as state telephone-based quit programs (if needed for special services)

American Lung Association
Toll-free number: 1-800-548-8252
Website: www.lungusa.org

> Print quit materials are available, some in Spanish. Also offers the tobacco cessation program "Freedom from Smoking Online" for a small fee at www.ffsonline.org; a free version is available, too

**Inclusion on this list does not imply endorsement by the American Cancer Society.*

No matter who you are, we can help. Contact us anytime, day or night, for information and support. Call us at **1-800-227-2345** or visit www.cancer.org.

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