

Nicotine and Youth

Information for Parents



First the good news! According to the 2024 National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS), teen tobacco use has dropped to its lowest level in 25 years! 2.25 million middle and high school students reported the current use of tobacco products in 2024, down from 2.8 million students the year before. The greatest drop came in the use of e-cigarettes, as youth use rates fell to under 6%. This is the lowest youth e-cigarette use rate at any point in the last decade.

Now for the not-so-good news, as one form of nicotine use starts to fall out of favor, other products are there waiting to capture the youth market. In this newsletter, we will explore nicotine's effects on the developing brain, new nicotine products that are gaining traction with young people as well as tips for prevention and resources for quitting.

Nicotine and the Teen Brain

The adolescent brain is still developing, making it more vulnerable than an adult brain to the effects of nicotine. A young person's brain still has a great deal of plasticity which means that its structure will adapt to environmental factors. Therefore, teens that use nicotine are more likely to develop an addiction to nicotine and even "rewire" their brains to increase the likelihood of addiction to other substances as well. According to the Truth Initiative, just 5 mg of nicotine a day, less than a quarter of a vape pod is enough to establish addiction in young people. In addition to its addictive qualities, regular use of nicotine has been shown to intensify feelings of depression, anxiety and stress.

The Brain on Nicotine

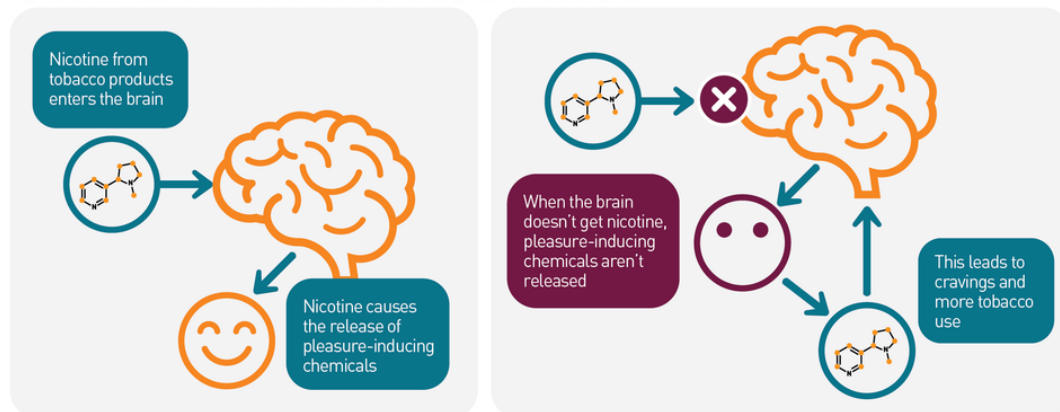


Image from Truth Initiative

Zyn and other Nicotine Pouches

Nicotine pouches are gaining popularity quickly and are viewed by many young people as a "safe" alternative to vaping and smoking cigarettes. The NYTS found nicotine pouches to be the second most commonly used product by middle and high school students, following e-cigarettes. 1.8% or 480,000 students reported the current use of nicotine pouches.

Nicotine pouches are small, flavored bags that contain nicotine powder, sweeteners, flavorings and plant-based fibers. These pouches work by dissolving in the mouth and releasing nicotine into the bloodstream through the gums or lining of the mouth. A pouch is placed between the lip and gum, left there for about 15-45 minutes, and after use the pouch can be removed and thrown away.

They are marketed as an alternative to smoking that is smokeless, odorless, vaporless and doesn't require spitting. And as with the rise of e-cigarettes, the flavors are appealing to youth. The NYTS found that nearly 86% of teens that use pouches use flavored products, with these being the most commonly used brands by youth: Zyn (68.7%), on! (14.2%), Rogue (13.6%), Velo (10.7%) and Juice Head ZTN (9.8%)



Currently, oral nicotine pouches are allowed to advertise on television and radio in ways that traditional cigarettes are not. They are using content that appeals to youth and marketing via television, radio, social media, sponsored events such as concerts and sporting events and more. Organizations such as the Truth Initiative are lobbying to have this loophole closed.

Tips for Talking to your Teen

- **Be approachable and talk to them early and often-** Start at the early elementary ages and keep the conversations casual and ongoing. Be sure to talk about more than just cigarettes as well as how all forms of nicotine are highly addictive.
- **Establish Clear Rules** – Setting clear, specific rules is the foundation for the parental effort in prevention. Establish a tobacco-free home.
- **Prepare your kids for peer pressure** – Discuss what they might say or do if a friend offers them a tobacco product. Let your child know that they can call you anytime to come get them. When in a peer pressure situation, they can use you as an excuse.
- **Know Their Friends** – Pay attention to who your child is hanging out with and take the opportunity to introduce yourself to their parents. Make sure the places where your child spends a lot of time are tobacco-free.

Other Resources

<https://candorhealthed.org/parent-information/family-resources/substance-abuse-prevention-resources/vaping-information/>
<https://truthinitiative.org/>
<https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/>
<https://www.lung.org/quit-smoking/helping-teens-quit>
<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/youth-quitting.html>

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**Chicago High Intensity
Drug Trafficking Areas**