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Smokeless Tobacco is not Harmless

by Lt. Michelle G. Hutchinson

When people talk about smokeless tobacco, they are referring to chewing tobacco or snuff. Most users of smokeless tobacco think it's harmless. This is not true. Smokeless tobacco can cause cancer of the mouth and throat, heart disease, gum disease, tooth abrasion and decay, bad breath and stained teeth. The nicotine in smokeless tobacco contains high levels of nitrosamines, which are cancer-causing agents. The habit of constantly holding tobacco in one location irritates the sensitive tissues of the mouth and often produces a white, leathery-appearing area called leukoplakia. Leukoplakias are pre-cancerous conditions. Also, nicotine is habit-forming or addictive. Nicotine-dependent people require a nicotine boost every 20 or 30 minutes to maintain stimulation. That is why some users of smokeless tobacco leave a plug of tobacco in their mouths as long as 24 hours a day. The constant use of nicotine can affect the heart and the rest of the circulatory system. It makes blood vessels smaller, which increases blood pressure and prevents oxygen-rich blood from efficiently moving about the body. High blood pressure leads to a greater risk of heart attacks and strokes. Also, rather than improving athletic performance (an often-heard false rumor), the decrease in the size of the blood vessels may slow reaction time. Smokeless tobacco also irritates the gums, causing them to pull away from the teeth. Eventually the gums and bones will stop supporting the teeth. Teeth will then loosen and fall out, or you may need to have them pulled. As the gum tissue pulls away from the tooth, the roots are exposed, making them more susceptible to decay. Sugars are added to smokeless tobacco during the manufacturing process to improve its taste. The sugar, combined with the bacteria on teeth, forms acids that can decay the tooth enamel. Many smokeless tobaccos contain high levels of abrasive grit and sand that weren't completely removed during the manufacturing process. Therefore, long-term users of smokeless tobacco experience more tooth abrasion (wearing away of the tooth's surface)

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Consider these facts:

- Users of smokeless tobacco have four times the risk of developing oral cancer than do non-users.
- Long-term users of snuff, the most popular form of smokeless tobacco among young people, have a 50 times greater risk of developing cancers of the lower lip and gums than do non-users.
- Using smokeless tobacco increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart attacks and strokes.
- Prolonged contact with smokeless tobacco and its juices irritates and inflames gums and causes them to recede from the teeth.

than do people who don't use it. Finally, the bad breath, discolored teeth and the constant need to spit are often offensive to others. Some of the

more serious physical consequences of the smokeless tobacco use,

such as oral cancer, is disfiguring. Smokeless tobacco is not

a safe alternative to cigarette smoking. Tobacco in any

form can jeopardize your health and cause

irreversible damage. It's not enough to have a

smokeless Navy; we need to have a

tobacco-less Navy. Lt. Hutchinson is assigned

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Tower.

