

Patient Handout: Basics of Nicotine

Description: Patient handout with information on the basics of nicotine.

Nicotine is a substance found in cigarettes and other tobacco products. When you inhale a cigarette, you are inhaling nicotine, along with more than 500 other chemicals. Nicotine is the drug that makes people become addicted. When you are addicted to nicotine, you feel as if you need nicotine in order to get through your day.

Because nicotine reaches the brain within 10 seconds after being inhaled, it may cause immediate as well as long-term effects. Listed below are potential effects.

Immediate Effects

- Increase in heart rate
- Increase in blood pressure
- Decrease in skin temperature
- Narrowing of arteries
- Thickening of blood
- Stimulation of the central nervous system
- Increase in respiration

Long-Term Effects

- Damaged immune system
- Cancer of the mouth, throat, and lungs
- Blockage of blood vessels
- High blood pressure
- Bronchitis and/or emphysema
- Stomach ulcers
- Production of abnormal sperm in males
- Dryness and wrinkling of the skin

Withdrawal Symptoms

Nicotine is very addictive. As with drugs, when you quit smoking, withdrawal symptoms may occur. These symptoms alone show that smoking cigarettes is just as difficult to conquer as drug use. In fact, the US Surgeon General has reported that nicotine is just as addictive as heroin and cocaine. The following are examples of withdrawal symptoms that may occur:

- Drop in pulse rate
- Craving for tobacco
- Drop in blood pressure
- Disturbance of sleep
- Slower reactions
- Tension
- Restlessness
- Depression
- Irritability
- Constipation
- Difficulty concentrating