

Hookah or Waterpipe

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In recent years, hookah smoking has increased in popularity, especially among adolescents and young adults, due to the introduction of sweetened/flavored waterpipe tobacco, the thriving hookah bar/café culture, perception of reduced harm, mass media, and the internet. (Maziak) A common myth is that hookah smoking is safer or less toxic than cigarette smoking.

Out of a convenience sample of primarily young adults in college, most believed waterpipe use to be less addictive and harmful than cigarette smoking, believed they could quit use at any time, but had no plans or desire to quit. Out of all respondents, 67% smoked waterpipes at least once a month. (Ward et al.)

Although hookah smoke may seem smoother and less irritating than cigarette smoke, hookah contains the same chemicals found in all tobacco, including nicotine. Sharing a hookah increases the risk of transmitting communicable diseases, viruses, and other illnesses. (Knishkowsky & Amitai)

A recent study published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* found that hookah smoking is associated with greater exposure to carbon monoxide (CO), similar nicotine levels, and "dramatically more smoke exposure" than cigarette use. (Eissenburgh & Shihadeh)

- After a 45-minute water pipe smoking session, participants' blood CO levels increased on average by 23.9 parts per million (ppm), versus 2.7 ppm after smoking a cigarette.
- Study participants were exposed to 1.7 times the amount of nicotine relative to the dose from a cigarette, due to the longer duration of water pipe sessions.
- The hookah smoking session also generated 40 times the volume of smoke compared to a cigarette. As with other types of tobacco, secondhand smoke from water pipes poses a serious health risk.

These findings, coupled with the conclusions of other research studies, suggest that water pipe tobacco smoking is associated with many of the same tobacco-caused diseases as cigarette smoking, including different types of cancers, cardiovascular and lung disease, and nicotine dependence.

Background

Hookah, also referred to as Shisha or Nargile (Narguileh), is a waterpipe that originated in 16th century India. The pipes are typically glass or metal, and very ornamental in appearance. Hookah pipes vary in size, shape, and composition, but they are usually shaped like a large bottle or small tank with a pipe on the end of a long, flexible cord. In most hookahs, the smoke is produced by placing hot charcoal on top of the tobacco to heat it. Hookah tobacco (known as Maassel) is often flavored with molasses, fruit pulp or honey. This provides it with a sweeter smell and more appealing taste. In a typical hookah bar, patrons can purchase flavored tobacco and rent a pipe to smoke it.



- Eissenburg, T., Shihadeh, A. 2009. Waterpipe Tobacco and Cigarette Smoking: Direct comparison of toxicant exposure. *Am J Prev Med* 37(6): 518-23.
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