



Hookah

What is a hookah?

A hookah is a waterpipe used to smoke specially-flavored tobacco called “shisha”. The tobacco is heated with charcoal and filtered through the water-filled body of the pipe before being inhaled through a hose. Hookah smoking is a social activity, often done in bars or cafés, with a single session lasting up to 60 minutes. The device has been used for centuries in the Middle East and Asia. U.S. brands of shisha include Social Smoke and Fumari.



Photo courtesy of Wake Forest Baptist Health

Hookah smoking is NOT safer than smoking cigarettes. Smoking hookah carries many of the same health risks as cigarette smoking: cancer, respiratory illness and lung damage. Hookah smoke may feel smoother and not “burn” when you inhale, but the smoke still contains dangerous toxins such as tar and carbon monoxide.

Smoking a hookah is NOT less addictive than smoking a cigarette.

Similar to the tobacco in cigarettes, shisha contains nicotine and carries the same risk of getting hooked as any other tobacco product. Hookah smokers can inhale 100 times more smoke during a one hour session than a single cigarette!

The water does NOT filter out harmful chemicals. Even after it passes through water, hookah smoke contains high levels of carbon monoxide, heavy metals and cancer-causing toxins making it just as harmful to the body as cigarette smoke.

Heating tobacco is NOT healthier than burning it. It doesn't matter how the smoke is produced, hookah smoke is just as dangerous as cigarette smoke. In fact, hookah smokers puff more often and inhale more deeply, absorbing higher concentrations of the same toxins in cigarette smoke.

Herbal shisha is NOT a safe alternative. Herbal shisha may not contain nicotine, but you are still exposed to cancer-causing substances. The charcoal used to heat it produces large amounts of carbon monoxide and tar.

Even if you don't inhale you are still putting yourself at risk. The health risks include gum disease, tooth loss, oral cancer and the effects of secondhand smoke. Sharing mouthpieces not properly washed between uses also exposes you to bacteria and viruses such as hepatitis, mono, flu and herpes.

Just being around hookah smoking is dangerous. Charcoal used to burn the tobacco generates high levels of carbon monoxide, an extremely toxic chemical. Even without inhaling directly, those around hookah smoking are exposed to the carbon-monoxide filled smoke.

THE BOTTOM LINE: CHOOSE NOT TO SMOKE HOOKAH.

For free help to quit smoking or using tobacco call 1-800-QUIT-NOW or visit www.smokefree.gov.



For more information about Tobacco Free Colleges or for assistance in adopting and implementing tobacco-free policies and promoting cessation visit www.tobaccofreecollegesnc.com.

Sources: Knishkowsky, B., Amitai, Y. (2005). Water-Pipe (Narghile) Smoking: An Emerging Health Risk Behavior. *Pediatrics*, 116, 113–119.; WHO Study Group on Tobacco Product Regulation. (2005) Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking: Health Effects, Research Needs, and Recommended Actions by Regulators.