

# The Surgeon General's Report for Kids about Smoking

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## The Real Deal about Tobacco

The Surgeon General says that 3,000 kids start smoking every day. They must not know the facts about tobacco — if they did, they'd stay miles away from the stuff! So let's cut through the smoke and get to the **Real Deal** about tobacco.

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*"Most kids my age smoke...don't they?"*



## The Real Deal

It might look that way, because tobacco companies pay lots of money to fill magazines and billboards with pictures of people smoking. But according to the Surgeon General, only 13 percent of (or 13 out of 100) adolescents have smoked in the last 30 days. And only 8 percent are "frequent" smokers. That means most kids -- 87 percent, to be exact — are smart enough not to smoke.

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*"We don't need to worry — smoking won't affect our health until we're a lot older...right?"*

## The Real Deal

You already know that smoking can cause things like cancer and heart disease, but the report also lists symptoms that start to develop as soon as you smoke your first cigarette -- no matter how young you are. These include shortness of breath, coughing, nausea, dizziness, and "phlegm production." Pretty gross, huh?

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*"But if you only smoke a little bit, that can't hurt...can it?"*

## The Real Deal

According to the Surgeon General, symptoms like wheezing and coughing have been found in kids who smoke just one cigarette a week.

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***"Well, at least tobacco use doesn't lead to other drug use...does it?"***

## **The Real Deal**

It doesn't always, but it certainly can. Many times tobacco is the first drug used by kids who use alcohol and illegal drugs. The SGR says that, compared with nonsmokers, kids who smoke are 3 times more likely to use alcohol. They're 8 times more likely to smoke marijuana, and 22 times more likely to use cocaine. Scary, huh?

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***"Kids who smoke think they're cool...are they?"***



## **The Real Deal**

Only if by "cool" you mean kids who probably aren't doing very well in school. The SGR found that students with the highest grades are less likely to smoke than those with the lowest grades. The same is true for smokeless tobacco -- daily tobacco use is highest among drop-outs, lowest among college students.

Kids who smoke have lower self-images. They look to smoking because they think it will give them a better image -- cooler, maybe, or more attractive, or more popular. And because their self-image is low, they don't have the confidence to say no when someone wants them to use tobacco.

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***"Well, if smoking is so bad, all you have to do is quit. How hard can that be?"***

## **The Real Deal**

Most teens who smoke want to stop. Nearly half of the high school seniors in the survey said they'd like to quit smoking. But they can't because, according to the SGR, "most young people who smoke daily are addicted to nicotine." In the same survey, about 40 percent said they tried to quit and couldn't.

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***"So maybe we're better off if we never start smoking."***

## **The Real Deal**

Quitting is not a pretty sight, because nicotine is as addictive as alcohol, heroin, or cocaine. According to the SGR, when people quit, they might experience "frustration, anger, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, restlessness, and decreased heart rate." The Surgeon General found that most smokers start before they finish high school. So if you make it to graduation day without starting to smoke, chances are you never will!