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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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Start Talking!

Building a Drug-Free Future



Know! The New Danger — Nicotine Toothpicks?



Do you KNOW! what an electronic cigarette and a toothpick have in common? They're both nicotine products promoted as "helping adults to quit smoking," yet they're both haphazardly finding their way into the hands (and mouths) of our youth nationwide.

Yes, a toothpick. Standard toothpicks are now being infused or coated with nicotine, so you can get your nicotine fix in a discrete manner virtually anywhere.

Here's how it works: You place it in your mouth like you would a normal toothpick. The saliva in the mouth draws out the nicotine which is then absorbed into your bloodstream. The effects are felt within 1-15 minutes and is said to last for up to an hour. Chewing on the toothpick increases the speed at which nicotine is released.

These toothpicks come in a variety of candy-like flavors that are likely to appeal to youth, such as strawberry, peppermint, spearmint, coffee, winter ice, and cinnamon, among others. They entice youth because they are inexpensive, easy to get ahold of, and even easier to get away with.

They are specifically marketed as being ideal for movie nights, date nights, airports, restaurants, parks, and any indoor space, and directly pushed toward anyone who is looking to hide the fact that they smoke or use other nicotine products. Youth may consider them discrete because they are:

- Odorless — no smell to cover up.



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- Smokeless — no plume of smoke to be seen.
- They do not require a spit cup.
- They do not interfere with daily activities — no need to step outside — you can use on the spot.
- They do not stir up lectures from family or friends — because no one will know you're using them.
- All this while freshening your breath — and what teen isn't conscious about that?

One pack of nicotine toothpicks (15 sticks) sells online for \$5.99, and the only protection against underage shoppers is a popup that asks if you're over the age of 18. The amount of nicotine per pack is equal to:

- One pack of cigarettes
- One can of dip
- One can of snus, a powder tobacco
- One electronic cigarette cartridge
- One JUUL pod

A single toothpick contains as much as 3 mg of nicotine compared to 1.5 mg of nicotine most smokers inhale from one cigarette. In other words, a packet really packs a punch, and that's bad for youth.

In an article published by the American Academy of Pediatrics, Dr. Lorena Siqueira said, "Nicotine is an extremely addictive substance, and the rapidly developing brains of teens are particularly susceptible to it."

Long-term exposure to nicotine is linked to increased risk for heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis and certain types of cancers. Early use of nicotine is also associated with addiction not only to nicotine itself, but to alcohol and other drugs.

While traditional cigarette use is down among teens, the use of electronic cigarettes among young people has skyrocketed. More children are also experimenting with the various substance-infused candies, like gummy bears and lollipops, because they don't appear to be very dangerous, and they can be consumed right under the noses of adults without raising any red flags. The same concept applies with these toothpicks. Plus, many youth would think they look cool with a toothpick hanging out of their mouth.

As parents and teachers, we must talk to our children and students about the dangers of nicotine and other substances. We have to make sure they're aware that something in a non-threatening package, like a gummy bear or a toothpick, can be unsafe and unhealthy for them. It's difficult to stay ahead of the ever-growing and changing drug trends and products that are available to our youth. That's why we have to make sure we build our children's resiliency skills and have conversations with our young people about what they can do to support their own health and well-being.

Sources: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Youth and Tobacco Use, January 2019](#), [Meghan Mangrum, Times Free Press \(Chattanooga, TN\): Officials warn of nicotine toothpick use by teens, January 13, 2019](#), [Pediatrics, January 2017, VOLUME 139 / ISSUE 1, From the American Academy of Pediatrics, Technical Report: Nicotine and Tobacco as Substances of Abuse in Children and Adolescents, Lorena M. Siqueira, COMMITTEE ON SUBSTANCE USE AND PREVENTION.](#)