



Social Smoking

What is social smoking?

Social smoking refers to the situational context of tobacco use. In contrast with people who smoke daily, social smokers are more likely to limit their cigarette intake to social gatherings.

Social smokers may not consider themselves addicted to nicotine or susceptible to nicotine addiction. Because there is no safe level of smoking, even social smokers are at risk for developing tobacco-related illnesses.

What are the effects of social smoking?

- The toxins emitted by cigarettes can overwhelm a person's clothes, hair and skin with the stale odor of tobacco.
- Smoking just a few cigarettes can stress the heart, increase blood pressure, damage the insides of blood vessels and cause various types of cancer.
- Because social smokers may use tobacco when they are around other smokers, their exposure to secondhand smoke is increased, and can lead to many serious health consequences.

Can social smokers become addicted to nicotine?

Physical Addiction

When a person smokes a cigarette, the body responds immediately to the nicotine by causing the release of dopamine in the brain—dopamine gives a feeling of pleasure and calm. Over time, a smoker requires increasingly higher levels of nicotine to get that same calm feeling.

Many people who experiment with infrequent

tobacco use eventually develop an addiction to nicotine. In fact, the percentage of casual users who become nicotine addicted is higher than the addiction percentage for heroin or cocaine.

Psychological Addiction

The psychological effects of smoking can be just as powerful as the physical effects. Social smokers may link their cigarette use with specific social settings, people or activities like alcohol consumption. These linkages become habit-forming and, eventually, it may be very difficult for social smokers to enjoy social events and activities without cigarettes. These associations with smoking in social situations can intensify the addiction and lead to cravings in other areas of a person's life or during daily activities.

If I am a social smoker, how can I quit?

- Tell your friends you're trying to quit and ask for their support.
- Try to avoid the social situations where you know you will want to smoke.
- Find a way to switch up your routine or restrict your social outings to environments protected by smoke-free policies.
- Talk to a health care provider developing a quit smoking plan.
- Join a cessation support group.
- RHAMC can help! Contact us today.