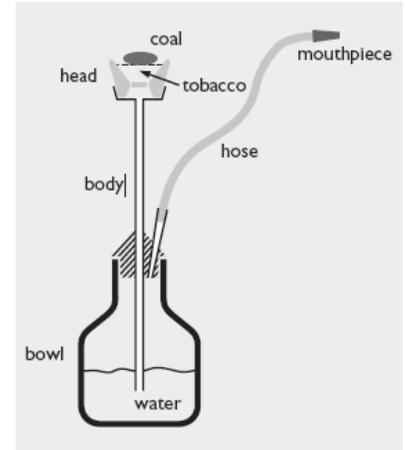


About Hookah (Fact Sheet courtesy of UDOH The TRUTH Campaign)

The hookah, also known as narghile, sheesha or hubbly-bubbly, is a waterpipe used to smoke tobacco.¹ Tobacco, which is generally moist, flavored and sweetened, is placed in the head of the waterpipe. The tobacco is heated by placing charcoal atop the tobacco-filled head, often separated by aluminum foil. The hose and mouthpiece through which the user inhales, is connected to the bowl that is half-filled with water.² When the smoker inhales, the smoke passes through the waterpipe body, bubbles through the water in the bowl and is then carried to the smoker through the hose.³



History of the Hookah

Hookah has been used to smoke tobacco and other substances for at least four centuries³, originating in ancient Persia and India.¹ By the 19th century, Turkish women of high society used hookahs as status symbols; they can often be seen in the art of the era. As time went on and people from the Middle East, India and Pakistan immigrated to Europe, hookah cafes began appearing in European cities. Today, hookah bars and cafes are quite popular in many parts of Britain, France, Spain, Russia and throughout the Middle East and are growing in popularity in the United States.¹

Originally created as a theoretically less harmful method of tobacco use, it was suggested, "smoke should be first passed through a small receptacle of water so that it would be rendered harmless." Thus, the widespread, unsubstantiated belief that the practice is safe is as old as the hookah itself.³

The Truth behind the Smokescreen

Is hookah less harmful than cigarette smoking?

Hookah smoking carries the same health risks as cigarette smoking, which includes lung cancer and heart disease. The smoke contains significant amounts of nicotine, tar and heavy metals¹ such as those found in batteries and rat poison.⁴ The World Health Organization estimates that hookah users may inhale as much smoke during one hookah session, as a cigarette smoker would inhale consuming 100 or more cigarettes!³

The heat sources that are applied to burn the tobacco such as wood cinders or charcoal also increase health risks. When these heat sources are burned, they emit their own potentially dangerous chemicals, including carbon monoxide and heavy metals.¹ The social aspects of hookah smoking pose even more health hazards, putting users at risk for infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, hepatitis and herpes. Shared mouthpieces and the heated, moist smoke can enhance the opportunity for such diseases to spread.¹ The truth is, tobacco kills and doesn't discriminate – hookah or cigarette. Using a hookah to smoke tobacco is NOT a safe alternative to cigarette smoking.³

Does the smoothness of the hookah smoke make it safer?

While hookah smoke is smooth and less irritating to the throat, it STILL contains tar, carbon monoxide and nicotine. It has been shown that the smoothness of the hookah smoke actually encourages users to inhale more deeply and use for a longer period of time causing greater exposure to harmful elements.⁵

Doesn't the water in a hookah filter out the harmful ingredients?

When passed through water, the smoke produced by a hookah continues to hold high levels of toxic compounds – carbon monoxide, heavy metals (such as those found in batteries and rat poison) and cancer-causing chemicals.³ Less than 5% of nicotine is actually filtered out into the water. This nominal reduction of nicotine may be offset by a tendency to compensate by inhaling more deeply and more often to get the desired effect.⁵

Is hookah safer because the tobacco is not burned?

Despite the fact that tobacco is heated rather than burned in a hookah pipe, it still produces smoke. Furthermore, as charcoal is used to heat tobacco, it too emits high levels of carbon monoxide. The levels of carbon monoxide as well as other deadly chemicals can be just as high as or even higher than that of cigarettes.^{1,5}

My hookah says it has no tar.

Of course it doesn't have any tar. Tobacco itself does not contain tar – tar is created when tobacco burns. Although tobacco is heated in a hookah rather than burned and reaches much lower temperatures than tobacco smoked in a cigarette, it still produces tar in high quantities.^{4,5} Tar is a sticky substance that damages the cilia (tiny hairs) that help clean out dirt and germs from your lungs; this damage contributes to lung diseases such as emphysema, cancer and bronchitis.⁶

Is hookah safer because the nicotine content is lower?

It is difficult to determine which product has higher levels of nicotine, as the amount varies greatly among both cigarettes and hookah tobacco. However, studies of hookah smokers found that a person who smokes hookah daily absorbs as much nicotine as someone who smokes 10 cigarettes a day, while an occasional hookah smoker (once during a four-day period) absorbs as much nicotine as smoking two cigarettes a day.⁵

Can I become addicted to nicotine from smoking a hookah?

Simple answer – yes. Hookah smoking is an efficient nicotine delivery system⁴ with potentially the same risk of dependence as any other way of using tobacco.⁵

Is second-hand smoke a concern?

Second-hand smoke from hookahs is a mixture of tobacco smoke in addition to smoke from the fuel (usually charcoal), and therefore puts non-users at risk for the same kinds of diseases as are caused by cigarette smoking, including cancer, heart disease, respiratory illnesses and adverse effects during pregnancy.³

Are there devices or accessories that make using hookah safer?

There is no proof that *ANY* device or accessory can make hookah smoking safer.³ Do not be fooled into false claims and promises. Tobacco kills.

Prevalence Today

Hookahs are the first new tobacco trend of the 21st century.¹ In the U.S. its use seems to be growing, especially among college students. Surveys estimate that 15-20% of college freshmen have used hookahs in the last month.⁷ Among college students, hookah smoking is associated with white race, younger age, and membership in fraternity or sorority.² This group appears to be targeted as nearly 300 new hookah cafes opened in the U.S. between 1999 and 2004, mostly in college towns,² with more appearing every day.¹

Current Trends/Marketing

- Hookah smoking is generally viewed as a social activity and a relatively inexpensive way to “get together” and have fun.¹ Often, the group shares one pipe and tries different flavors throughout the evening,¹ such as apple, bubble gum, chocolate, mint, orange soda, root beer and watermelon; just to name a few. Hookahs are considered more pleasant and less irritating to the throat by many smokers, which adds to its appeal and explains why some people, particularly young people who otherwise would not use tobacco begin to use hookah.¹
- Currently, marketing for hookah pipes and their specialized tobacco is limited to specialty shops and online stores,¹ where charcoal, tobacco and accessories are also sold.³ However, the introduction of new accessories for hookahs is making them more easily accessible, popular and attractive. Hookah pipes are now portable and come with a carrying case and shoulder straps. Mouthpieces that contain activated charcoal or cotton, chemical additives for the water bowl and plastic mesh fittings to create smaller bubbles are sold with claims of reducing the harmfulness of the smoke.³
- The hookah bars and cafes are working to reach wider audiences as evident by the growing popularity and number of establishments that rent hookah pipes. Business owners are branching out by placing advertisements in free local papers; these advertisements are very common in the nation's 80 alternative free weekly papers as well as ads in college papers and magazines.¹

¹ American Lung Association. “An Emerging Deadly Trend: Waterpipe Tobacco Use.” 2007. 10 June 2009. <http://www.lungusa2.org/embargo/slati/TrendAlert_Waterpipes.pdf>

² Primack, B., Walsh, M., Bryce, C., Eissenberg, T. (2009) Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking Among Middle and High School Students in Arizona. *Pediatrics* 123, e282-e288. Available online at <<http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/123/2/e282>>

³ World Health Organization. “Waterpipe Tobacco Smoking: Health Effects, Research Needs and Recommended Actions by Regulators.” 2005. 8 June 2009. <http://www.who.int/tobacco/global_interaction/tobreg/waterpipe/en/index.html>

⁴ Asotra, K. “The Latest on Hookahs: What You Don't Know Can Kill You.” August 2005. Wesleyan University. 17 June 2009.

<<http://www.wesleyan.edu/weswell/docs/drugs/The%20latest%20on%20Hookahs.pdf>>

⁵ CESAR FAX. “Scientific Evidence of the Health Risks of Hookah Smoking.” 9 June 2008. University of Maryland, College Park. 2 June 2009.

<<http://www.cesar.umd.edu/cesar/cesarfax/vol17/17-23.pdf>>

⁶ Canadian Lung Association. “Smoking and Tobacco: What's in Cigarettes.” 2008. 17 June 2009. <http://www.lung.ca/protect-protegez/tobacco-tabagisme/facts-faits/what-que_e.php>

⁷ CESAR FAX. “Hookah Smoking: A Growing Public Health Issue.” 2 June 2008. Univ of MD, College Park. 17 June 2009. <<http://www.cesar.umd.edu/cesar/cesarfax/vol17/17-22.pdf>>