

Cigars and pipes

Cigars and pipes are not safe alternatives to cigarettes.¹⁻⁴

Cigar and pipe smoking rates

A 2010 study found that 1.5% of all Victorian adults surveyed currently smoked cigars. Of the respondents who smoked tobacco products, 10.3% smoked cigars and 3.2% smoked pipes.⁵

In the 2010 survey of Australians aged 14 years or older, cigar and pipe users are grouped together. Of the respondents who smoked tobacco, 8% used cigars or pipes and 2% smoked cigars or pipes only.⁶

Cigars

Cigars consist of filler, binder and wrapper which are made of air-cured and fermented tobaccos.¹ Like the tobacco in cigarettes, cigar tobacco, when burnt, produces thousands of chemicals.⁷ At least 63 of these chemicals are known to cause cancer in animals, including 11 known to cause cancer in humans.¹

Cigars are often flavoured and sold in small pack sizes, which makes them appealing to smokers. In 2010, five of the top ten cigars brands sold in Australia were flavoured cigars.⁸

How do cigars differ from cigarettes?

Cigars are different to cigarettes because they contain fermented tobacco. Fermentation is a controlled treatment where the leaves are packed in rooms with high temperatures and humidity for weeks at a time. As a result, cigar smoke contains higher levels of ammonia, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and cancer-causing compounds, such as nitrosamines. Tar produced by cigars is more carcinogenic than cigarette tar.¹

Cigar smoke is alkaline (i.e. less acidic than cigarette smoke), and has higher levels of nicotine, which can be more easily absorbed through the lining of the mouth.⁴ For this reason, cigar smokers tend not to inhale the smoke into their lungs, as cigarette smokers do.^{1, 2}

Smoking-related disease and death rates for cigar smokers

Note: ‘Cigar smokers’ refer to people who **only** smoke cigars and have **never** smoked cigarettes.

Cigar smokers have higher death rates than non-smokers for most smoking-related diseases. However, cigar smokers generally have lower overall disease and death rates than cigarette smokers.^{2, 9-11}

This is because the level of risk from cigar smoking is related to:

- **how deeply the smoke is inhaled**
Most cigar smokers do not inhale the smoke into their lungs. Instead they absorb the nicotine through the lining of their mouth.^{1, 2}
- **how often a person smokes cigars**
The majority of cigar smokers smoke occasionally, whereas most cigarette smokers smoke every day.²

If a cigar smoker smokes as much tobacco and inhales as deeply as a cigarette smoker, then they have a similar level of risk for smoking-related diseases as a cigarette smoker.² For example, studies have shown that cigar smokers who inhale the smoke have around two to four times the risk for certain cancers than those who don’t inhale.^{3, 12}

Ex-cigarette smokers who smoke cigars

Studies show that smokers who have switched from cigarettes to cigars are more likely to inhale cigar smoke into their lungs. Cigar smokers who inhale are at a much higher risk for all major smoking-related diseases.^{1, 2}

People who smoke both cigarettes and cigars

People who smoke both cigarettes and cigars have high risks for smoking-related diseases, close to that of cigarette-only smokers.^{2, 12} The majority of these smokers inhale cigar smoke.¹

Cigars and disease

On comparing cigar smokers who have never smoked cigarettes with cigarette smokers:

- Cigar smokers have high risks for cancers of the mouth, throat, larynx and oesophagus, similar to cigarette smokers.^{2, 3}
- Cigar smokers have lower risks than cigarette smokers for lung cancer, heart disease, and the lung disease ‘chronic obstructive pulmonary disease’ (COPD). However, they have greater risks for these diseases than people who have never smoked.²

Cigar smoking also increases the risk of cancers of the pancreas, stomach, bladder and bowel.^{3, 12} A study of middle-aged men has linked cigar smoking with erection problems.¹³ Cigar smokers also suffer from higher levels of gum disease and tooth loss than non-smokers.^{14, 15} Cigar smoke contains more sulfur than cigarette smoke, so cigar smokers tend to suffer from halitosis (bad breath) more than cigarette smokers.¹⁶

Are cigars addictive?

Cigar smoke contains high levels of nicotine, the addictive drug in tobacco. Nicotine from cigars can reach the brain at a sufficiently rapid rate to produce addiction. This is still true even if the smoke is not inhaled into the lungs.^{1, 2}

However, while most cigarette smokers smoke daily, the majority of cigar smokers smoke only occasionally, suggesting that cigars may not be as similarly addictive as cigarettes.² Addiction to cigars could also be related to the age at which smoking is started.¹ Research on cigar addiction is still too limited to draw definite conclusions.²

In summary, cigars *may* be addictive.²

Cigars and secondhand smoking

Cigar smoke can be a major source of indoor air pollution. When equal amounts of tobacco from cigarettes and cigars are burnt, the smoke from the burning tip of the cigar produces more toxic and cancer-causing compounds than cigarette smoke.¹ High secondhand smoke exposure from cigars may be associated with lung cancer risk.⁴

Pipes

Pipe tobacco is usually a blend of tobacco. It may contain a large percentage of additives, such as sweeteners.^{10, 17} Like cigar smoke, pipe smoke is alkaline.¹⁰

Pipes and disease

Note: 'Pipe smokers' refer to people who **only** smoke pipes and have **never** smoked cigarettes.

Pipe smokers have higher death rates for smoking related disease than non-smokers, but lower death rates than cigarette smokers.⁹ The reasons for this are similar to those for cigar smokers: in particular they tend not to inhale the smoke into their lungs.^{9, 10}

- Pipe smokers have similar risks to cigarette smokers for cancers of the mouth, throat, larynx and oesophagus.^{3, 9, 10}
- Pipe smokers have lower risks than cigarette smokers for lung cancer and COPD.¹⁰ These risks are higher than non-smokers'.¹⁰
- Pipe smokers have a higher risk for heart disease than people who have never smoked.^{10, 18} In some studies their risk is similar to that of cigarette smokers.^{19, 20}
- Pipe smoking also increases the risk of cancers of the pancreas, stomach, bladder and bowel.³
- Cigarette smokers who switch to pipe-only smoking only have a slight difference in risk compared with cigarette smokers.^{12, 19} This is partly due to pipe-only smokers increasing their pipe consumption after switching.¹²
- Pipe smokers who are also heavy drinkers have a greatly increased risk of cancers of the mouth, throat and oesophagus.^{3, 21}

Although there is limited research on pipe smoking, it appears to have similar risks to cigar smoking for contracting smoking-related diseases.

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