

Cigars and pipes

Cigars and pipes cause cancer and other smoking-related diseases.¹⁻⁴ There is no safe level of cigar or pipe smoking.^{4,5} The risks for smoking-related diseases and death can be as high as for cigarette smoking.^{1-4, 6,7}

People who smoke cigars or pipes have high risks for cancers of the mouth, throat, voice box and food pipe (oesophagus). When they smoke and also drink high amounts of alcohol, it greatly increases the risk for these cancers.^{1,2,6}



Cigar and pipe smoking rates

In a 2022–23 survey, 11% of Australians aged 14 years or older said they currently smoked tobacco. Of this group, 4% smoked cigarillos (small to mid-sized cigars), 5% smoked cigars, and 4% smoked pipes during the past year.⁸



Cigars

Cigars consist of a filler, binder and wrapper made from air-cured and fermented tobaccos.³ Cigars and cigarillos are often flavoured and sold in small pack sizes, which makes them appealing to young people.⁹⁻¹⁴

Burning cigar tobacco produces thousands of chemicals.^{2,5} The smoke includes nicotine and the same toxic chemicals created by cigarette smoking.² At least 63 of these chemicals cause cancer.³

How do cigars differ from cigarettes?

Cigars are different to cigarettes because they contain fermented tobacco. 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. Cigar smoke is at least as harmful and as likely to cause cancer as cigarette smoke and maybe more so.^{1,3,6}

Most people who only smoke cigars tend not to inhale the smoke into their lungs, like people who smoke cigarettes do.²⁻⁴ This is because nicotine, the addictive substance in tobacco, is affected by how acidic the tobacco smoke is. The smoke of most cigars is alkaline so nicotine is more easily absorbed through the lining of the mouth.^{2,4} In contrast, cigarette smoke is more acidic making the nicotine less readily absorbed by the mouth, and so people who smoke cigarettes tend to inhale the smoke into their lungs in order to get enough nicotine.⁴ People used to smoking cigarettes also tend to inhale cigar smoke.^{3,4}

Diseases caused by cigar smoking

Cigar smoking increases the risk of:

- cancers of the mouth, throat, voice box and food pipe (oesophagus)^{1,2}; these risks are high whether or not people inhale and can be as high as the risks for cigarette smoking^{4,6,7}
- gum disease and tooth loss (periodontal disease)^{1,2,15,16}
- cancers of the lung, pancreas and bladder^{1,2,7}
- heart disease and aortic aneurysm (ballooning in the wall of the large blood vessel in the heart)^{1,2,7,17}
- lung disease (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease or COPD).^{1,2}

Smoking-related disease and death rates for people who smoke cigars

Note: 'People who only smoke cigars' refers to people who have **never** smoked cigarettes.

People who only smoke cigars have higher death rates from smoking-related diseases than people who don't smoke.¹

The level of risk from cigar smoking increases with:

- **how deeply the smoke is breathed in**
People who breathe in cigar smoke down into their lungs have higher risks for smoking-related diseases than people who smoke cigars and don't inhale.¹⁻⁴ For example, people who inhale cigar smoke have around two to four times the risk for certain cancers than cigar smokers who don't inhale.^{7,18}
- **how often a person smokes cigars**
Some people who smoke cigars do so once in a while but other people smoke daily.^{4,8}
- **how many years a person smokes cigars**

The sooner someone quits smoking cigars, the lower their risk for smoking-related disease.^{4,18}

People who switch from cigarettes to cigars

Studies show that people who have switched from cigarettes to cigars are more likely to inhale cigar smoke into their lungs resulting in a much higher risk for the main smoking-related diseases.^{3,4}

People who smoke both cigarettes and cigars

People who smoke both cigarettes and cigars have high risks for smoking-related diseases, similar to people who only smoke cigarettes.^{4,18} Most people who smoke both products tend to inhale cigar smoke.^{2,3}

Are cigars addictive?

Cigars can be addictive.^{2,4} Cigar smoke contains high levels of nicotine. The addictive potential of nicotine is partly related to how much nicotine is absorbed and how quickly it reaches the brain. While nicotine delivery to the brain is slower when nicotine is absorbed through the mouth compared to being inhaled and absorbed through the lungs, it still can reach the brain fast enough to be addictive.^{3,4}

The extent of addiction is likely to be based on pattern of use.² While most people who smoke cigarettes smoke daily, most people who only smoke cigars do so occasionally,

suggesting that cigars may not be as highly addictive as cigarettes.^{4,8} However, Australians who smoke cigarillos are more likely to smoke daily than people who smoke cigars.⁸

Addiction to cigars could also be related to the age at which smoking is started.³

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.³ Secondhand smoke exposure from cigars may be associated with lung cancer risk.¹



Pipes

Pipe tobacco may contain a large percentage of additives, such as sweeteners.^{19,20} Like cigar smoke, pipe smoke is alkaline allowing nicotine to be more easily absorbed through the lining of the mouth.¹⁹

Pipes and disease

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

Like cigar smoking, the risk of dying from a smoking-related disease from pipe smoking increases with the amount smoked, how deeply it's inhaled and the number of years of smoking.²¹

When people who smoke pipes smoke a similar amount of tobacco as people who smoke cigarettes, they have similar death rates for smoking-related disease as people who smoke cigarettes.²²

When people switch from smoking cigarettes to only smoking pipes, they have little reduction in risk for smoking-related disease compared to cigarette smoking.^{18,22}

Diseases caused by pipe smoking

Pipe smoking increases the risk of:

- Cancers of the mouth, throat, voice box (larynx) and food pipe (oesophagus); these risks are high whether or not smokers inhale and can be as high as the risks for cigarette smoking.^{1,6}
- Cancers of the lung, pancreas, stomach, bladder and bowel^{1,6}
- Heart disease^{19,21}; in some studies the risk is similar to people who smoke cigarettes^{22,23}
- Stroke^{1,21}
- Lung disease – chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)^{1,21}

Please note: this information is for general use only. Please consult your health professional for further advice.

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