Positive Choices
Drug and Alcohol Information
Get informed, stay smart, stay safe

What do we know about nicotine pouches?

What are nicotine pouches?

Nicotine pouches are small bags that users place between their lip and gum. They contain nicotine that is either synthetic or has been extracted from tobacco plants. The pouches also often contain sweeteners and flavours and are usually sold in small round tins. When someone uses a nicotine pouch, the nicotine is absorbed through mucous membranes (soft tissue in the mouth) and then enters the bloodstream.

Nicotine is the same addictive stimulant found in cigarettes and some e-cigarettes/vapes. It changes the way the brain works and causes cravings for more nicotine. The nicotine concentration in these products can vary and isn't always properly labelled.

Do nicotine pouches contain tobacco?

Usually when people refer to nicotine pouches, they are talking about pouches that don't contain tobacco. Pouches that do contain tobacco are sometimes known as 'snus'. These pouches are used in a similar way to nicotine pouches, and the nicotine is absorbed from the tobacco. Smokeless tobacco products, including snus, arebanned in Australia. Studies have shown a link between using these products and diseases, including cancers.

How many young people are using nicotine pouches?

As nicotine pouches are a relatively new product, and can't be legally sold in Australia, there isn't much data about their use. However, there are some anecdotal reports of use by young people and authorities have seized nicotine pouches from retailers, which shows they are being imported.

A 2024 online survey that included 535 Australians aged 16-17 years old found that 12% had tried a nicotine pouch. It is important to note that the study had a small number of participants. The researchers also found participants through an online panel provider. This is a platform where individuals sign up to participate in paid surveys. This means that the people who participated in the study might not be a good representation of the general population.

Like e-cigarettes, nicotine pouches often have bright coloured packaging and flavours that appeal to young people. They are also discreet and easy to hide, which may lead to more regular use. Some Australian influencers have promoted nicotine pouches over social media, which may also contribute to their appeal.

What are the risks?

There isn't a lot of evidence about the risks of nicotine pouches, as they are a relatively new product and haven't been widely used. In asmall study, some young Australians who have used nicotine pouches said they made them feel sick and hurt their gums. As of January 2025, no nicotine pouches have been evaluated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) for safety or quality.

We do know that nicotine is an addictive substance, which can be difficult for a person to stop using once they start.Withdrawal symptoms can include irritability, difficulty concentrating, depression, or appetite changes. Internationally, nicotine pouches have been found to contain very high concentrations of nicotine, causing concerns.Research suggests that nicotine use during adolescence may negatively affect brain development and cognitive function in adulthood.Studies also indicate that people are more likely to become dependent on nicotine when they are exposed at a younger age.

Additional research has linked nicotine to increased blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and heart disease risks. Nicotine may also impact the immune system.

Nicotine poisoning can occur when a large dose of nicotine is consumed. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, feeling dizzy, headaches, and increased heart rate. More serious symptoms can include loss of consciousness and seizures. The Poisons Information Line is available 24/7 on 13 11 26. In case of emergency, call 000 for an ambulance.

Despite claims that nicotine pouches are effective smoking or vaping cessation tools, there is not strong evidence to support this. Some studies have found that nicotine pouches may contain fewer harmful chemicals compared to cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products like snus. However, these studies were small, and some were conducted by the tobacco industry. Several large tobacco companies manufacture nicotine pouches. This involvement raises concerns about potential biases or misleading research.

Are they legal in Australia?

Retailers cannot legally sell nicotine pouches in Australia. This is because nicotine pouches are not approved by the TGA or included on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG). The ARTG is an online database that lists therapeutic goods (such as medicines and medical devices) that can be legally sold and used in Australia.

In some circumstances, individuals with a valid prescription can import nicotine pouches for personal use. If the imports do not comply with strict conditions, the products may be seized and destroyed.

What should you do if you are concerned about nicotine pouches?

If you are worried about a young person using nicotine pouches, have a read through our guides on talking to your child about e-cigarettes/vaping and starting the conversation when you are concerned about drug and alcohol use. Our factsheet on the warning signs of dependence on drugs can also assist in recognising the signs that a young person may need support. A GP or health worker can provide cessation support and help manage nicotine dependence. You can also contact Quitline on 13 7848.

For more information about quitting nicotine, see https://www.health.gov.au/topics/smoking-vaping-and-tobacco/how-to-quit

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