

# JUST THE FACTS: Tobacco

## SMOKING AND BALANCE

**Nicotine** is a drug found in all tobacco products, such as cigarettes, cigars, snuff and dip. Nicotine can produce a calm feeling for short periods of time. But over time, the body needs more and more of this drug to feel good; as a result, smoking becomes a big part of a person's life. People smoke when they are bored or upset, or out of habit—for example, while drinking coffee, driving a car, or hanging out with other smokers.

Because smoking is so linked to other common activities, quitting can be very hard to do and may take many tries. But it is never too late! In fact, more than 3 million American smokers quit every year.

### Smoking in the Military

For a long time the military had a reputation for being an organization in which smoking was accepted and common. In the 1980s, more than half of military personnel on active duty were smokers. Even though service members are smoking a little bit less than they were in the 1980s, tobacco use is still pretty high among military personnel.<sup>1</sup> This high rate of smoking is concerning for several reasons:

- **Illnesses.** Smoking-related illnesses such as heart disease, cancer and lung disease take a huge toll on the physical readiness of service members.
- **Problems at Work.** Service members who smoke are more likely to miss work, have poorer motor and perceptual skills, and less endurance.
- **Health Care Costs.** Each year, the Department of Defense spends an estimated \$875 million on smoking-related health care costs and to cover losses due to smokers missing work and being less productive when they are at work.
- Service members often say they started smoking to:
  - Relax and calm down
  - Relieve stress
  - Relieve boredom
  - Fit in with buddies
  - "Look cool" or to "be cool"

<sup>1</sup>2005 Department of Defense survey of health related behaviors among active duty military personnel: A component of the Defense Lifestyle Assessment Program (DLAP). (2006).

### SMOKERS ARE AT A HIGHER RISK FOR:

- Lower quality of life
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Shortened life
- Lung disease
- Cancer
- Heart disease and stroke
- Sexual impotence and infertility
- Cataracts, skin wrinkling and skin discoloration
- Increased use of other drugs and alcohol
- Complicated pregnancy
- Unhealthy families

Take an anonymous online screening at [AfterDeployment.dcoe.mil/assessment/nicotine](http://AfterDeployment.dcoe.mil/assessment/nicotine)  
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### Service members who currently smoke heavily are more likely to experience the following problems:

- **Stress:** A higher number of service members who smoke heavily said they had “a lot” of stress at work in the past year compared to service members who had quit smoking or who had never smoked at all.
- **Loss of Activities:** A higher number of service members who smoke heavily had cut back on their usual activities compared to service members who had quit smoking or who had never smoked at all.
- **Anxiety:** Service members who smoke heavily are about twice as likely to feel anxious compared to service members who had quit smoking and service members who had never smoked.
- **Depression:** Service members who smoke heavily are about twice as likely to feel depressed compared to service members who had quit smoking and service members who had never smoked.
- **Suicidal Thoughts:** Service members who smoke heavily are 2.5 times as likely to report having suicidal thoughts in the past year compared to service members who had quit smoking and service members who had never smoked.
- **Distress:** Service members who smoke heavily are twice as likely to report serious psychological distress in the past 30 days compared to service members who had quit smoking and service members who had never smoked.
- **Combat Stress Reactions:** Service members who smoke heavily are four times as likely to meet the screening criteria for further posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) when compared to service members who had quit smoking and service members who had never smoked.

### Help to Stop Smoking Is Available

- Military installations and medical facilities have smoking cessation programs for all service members and employees.
- TRICARE beneficiaries can get help by calling a 24-hour toll-free support line in their U.S. region:  
**North: 1-866-459-8766 / South: 1-877-414-9949 / West: 1-888-713-4597**
- VA medical facilities and Vet Centers provide smoking cessation programs.
- **smokefree.gov** is a U.S. government-sponsored website that provides smoking cessation help and online chat support.

### SMOKING CESSATION TIPS

**START** to quit by taking these five important steps:

**S** = Set a quit date.

**T** = Tell family, friends and co-workers that you plan to quit.

**A** = Anticipate and plan for the challenges you'll face while quitting.

**R** = Remove cigarettes and other tobacco products from your home, car and work.

**T** = Talk to a doctor about getting help to quit.



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