

Through With Chew at Lake State

Contributed by Kayla Robertson
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Last Wednesday, February 20, Senior nursing students in LSSU's Community Health class presented an interactive booth with information on how to quit chewing tobacco. The event was largely successful, with a number of students stopping by for information and registering to win a free t-shirt. The students were well-prepared and gave the booth a fun atmosphere.

Chewing tobacco has some unpleasant effects as well as some deadly ones. On the less hazardous side of things, it's expensive, it causes bad breath, stains your teeth, it can make you sick, and it can be a huge turn off. It's often embarrassing on a first date to ask if they mind if you chew, or to have a first kiss knowing that you still taste like wintergreen and nicotine. Let's do some quick math. A can of dip is about \$3 (give or take), if you go through 2 cans per week, you spend \$300 dollars a year on tobacco. I don't know about you but my loans are a little too unforgiving for that kind of expense on a carcinogen. If you go through a can per day, you're spending over \$1000 per year. One more not-so-nasty (but definitely saddening) side effect of chewing tobacco: your taste buds go numb. That means that the lasagna your mom makes that's absolutely to die for doesn't smell or taste as good.

Despite the small drawbacks, chewing tobacco is a very serious problem. A lot of people (including students) quit smoking (because they know it's unhealthy) and turn to smokeless tobacco. The problem is that it's not any healthier. In fact, snuff users consume (on average) 10 times more cancer causing substances than smokers. Chewing tobacco contains 28 carcinogens (including embalming fluid, uranium, and nuclear waste), nicotine, lead, hydrocarbons (like in car exhaust). A smokeless tobacco user who goes through 2 cans per week gets as much nicotine as a person who smokes a pack and a half per day. Dippers are 50 times more likely to develop oral cancer than those who don't use tobacco. By the way, oral cancer is a broad term given to cancers of the tongue, cheek, lip, and pharynx. Oral cancer is very deadly. Because you lose so much muscle (from the jaw, mouth, and neck), only half of those diagnosed survive more than five years after diagnosis. Oral cancer claims 8,000 lives each year. In fact, one person dies every hour from oral cancer. A dentist or doctor can perform an oral exam to see if you have oral cancer. A common sign is leukoplakia (a rough white or red patch on the lip). About 5% of these lesions turn out to be cancerous. There are other dangers of smokeless tobacco, too. Tooth decay is another big hazard. The sugar in chewing tobacco sits on the teeth and causes the roots to decay. Also, gums pull away from the teeth where the tobacco is held. Ladies and gents, this is a wonderful way to lose teeth. Cancer of the esophagus and larynx are also more common in spit tobacco users. Lastly, chewing increases your risk of heart disease and stroke.

So you're determined to quit, now what? There are several support groups, websites, government guides, and even products to help you. Let your friends and family know you're quitting. Saying it will reaffirm your quitting and keep friends from offering you a chew. Set a quit date and stick to it. Set a date to have all your tobacco thrown out by. It's up to you whether you wean yourself off or use that date as a cold turkey day. Find an oral habit to replace chewing. A lot of people turn to chewing gum. Some people prefer to chew sunflower seeds. Find your triggers (the things that make you want a dip, for example, going to a ballgame or going hunting for the weekend) and make sure you're aware of them and prepared to deal with them. Whatever the case remember to be gentle with yourself for "mistakes". You can always go back to the original plan. Each person needs different things to quit. Find what works for you and reward yourself for your efforts and your successes! For more support and information, visit www.smokefree.com or www.cancer.org. Searching "quit chewing" or any related phrase will turn up a wealth of helpful resources. Good Luck!