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Are clove cigarettes as bad as regular cigarettes? ^[1]

Alice,

I love clove cigarettes, but I don't want to get addicted or cancer. Are cloves bad for you like regular cigarettes are?

puffy

Answer

Dear puffy,

Good for you for thinking carefully about the potential similarities between clove cigarettes and regular cigarettes, as many people may think they are quite different. In fact, clove cigarettes (which some people believe are safer and more natural than regular cigarettes), also called kreteks, do contain tobacco — and quite a bit, at that! Limiting your exposure to addictive substances like tobacco can certainly help you reduce your cancer risks.

Clove cigarettes typically contain between 60 to 70 percent tobacco and 30 to 40 percent shredded cloves (a spice). Considering their tobacco content, clove cigarettes are probably as harmful and addictive as regular cigarettes. As a matter of fact, kreteks may hold even more risk. According to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) ^[2] (CDC), clove cigarettes deliver more nicotine, tar, and carbon monoxide than regular American cigarettes brands.

Smoking tobacco in any form or amount can increase the risk of:

- Cancer — many types including lung, larynx, oral cavity, nose and sinuses, pharynx, esophagus, stomach, pancreas, cervix, kidney, bladder, ovary, colorectum, and acute myeloid leukemia
- Heart disease
- Aneurysms
- Bronchitis
- Emphysema
- Stroke
- Reduced fertility

- Increased risk of miscarriage
- Erectile dysfunction
- Birth defects

Smoking clove cigarettes may pose an additional risk due to the active ingredient — eugenol, (a topical anesthetic commonly used in dentistry). The short- and long-term health effects of eugenol are not well known, and little inhalation toxicology research has been done on this substance. However, when smoked, eugenol may numb the throat and potentially impair the gag reflex. This anesthetizing effect could cause some problems; for example, smokers may not feel the harshness of the smoke as strongly, so they are more likely to inhale the smoke more deeply and hold it in the lungs for a longer period of time before exhaling. As a result, it's possible that eugenol has the potential to facilitate lung infections, respiratory illnesses, or allergic reactions in certain users, especially in smokers with existing breathing problems and/or other sensitivities.

Clove cigarettes are one of several kinds of “alternative” methods of using tobacco. You may have heard of other cigarette alternatives like smoking hookah, smokeless tobacco, [cigars](#), [pipes](#) [3], or [e-cigarettes](#) [4]. People may use the "alternatives" because they think that they are cool and/or safer than standard cigarettes, but the facts are quite the contrary. In the case of cloves, some people prefer them because of their various sweet flavors. In 2009, the United States actually banned these sweet smokes as part of the [Family Smoking Prevention and Control Act](#) [5]. The ban on the sale of flavored cigarettes aims to detour their sale to young people and hopefully reduce the amount of new smokers, who, according to statistics, are typically under 18 years of age.

While it may be a harsh reality to inhale, the truth of the matter is clove cigarettes are just as potentially addictive and harmful to your health as regular cigarettes — and they are illegal in the United States. Quitting a habit you enjoy — especially one that can be so easily addictive — can be tough on your own. If you or someone you know is interested in quitting, see below for lots of programs available to support you becoming a non-smoker.

Hope this helps set the smoking record straight!

Alice!

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