

Hooked on Hookahs?

Recent Comparisons of Hookahs and Cigarettes Are a Smoke Screen

The notion that smoking hookahs is as harmful to your body as cigarettes has little scientific data to substantiate the claim. The “experts” compare hookah and cigarette smoke using varying sets of data. One frequently posted evaluation compares the volume of inhaled smoke. One problem is that it uses a single cigarette versus an entire hour of smoking a hookah. Another is that hookah smokers do not smoke hookahs 20 times per day, while that rate of consumption is typical for cigarette smokers. Those who do smoke hookahs do it occasionally, not every day, and many don’t even inhale, or inhale very lightly. Who can say the same for cigarette smokers?

Hookahs are generally used in social settings by groups. Customers at Paymon’s Hookah Lounges come in, on average, a few times a month, and the hookahs last about 30 to 40 minutes before they burn out.

Nor does anything show that hookah smoke is equally as harmful as cigarette smoke, since the compounds and quantities are not published from a legitimate, scientifically controlled study.

The Mayo Clinic makes claims such as, “Hookah smoke poses dangers associated with secondhand smoke”, without citing studies. On its website, the Centers for Disease Control states that, “Hookah smoking is typically practiced in groups, with the same mouthpiece passed from person to person.” It is common knowledge that hookahs in public or private are used with plastic, single-use mouthpieces.

The CDC also says hookah smoke delivers the same addictive drug, nicotine (shown in bold lettering, even!), as found in cigarettes. However it fails to mention the quantity of nicotine in a hookah versus a cigarette. As the operator of the America’s first official hookah lounge, which opened 10 years ago, I have yet to see someone carrying around their hookah to get a fix.

On Cancer.org, it states, “Several types of cancer, including lung cancer, have been linked to hookah smoking.” Yet again, no scientifically controlled studies supporting this claim are cited.

The International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health does cite a recent review in the *Journal of the International Union of Tuberculosis and Lung Disease*, that “it openly declares that hookah smoking might well be a ploy of the tobacco industry.” Apart from various misquotations, errors and underlying paranoia about Big Tobacco, it also presents a selection of studies with no comments on the fact that the participants were simultaneous or former smokers of cigarettes or other products

So, what is the reason for these recent, unsubstantiated attacks on hookah smoking? Let’s look at some possible sources. Tobacco companies are always averse to competition, despite what some conspiracy-minded journals believe, and hold incredible political influence. Insurance companies support any information, no matter how flawed,

that may lead to hikes in premiums. Intolerance or plain ignorance to Middle Eastern culture may also play a role.

There is a multitude of possible reasons explaining the smoke and mirrors being used against hookah smoking and the false comparisons of it to cigarette smoking. If this trickery continues, rest assured a movement will soon follow to stop hookahs as we know them.

I urge all hookah smokers to do the research and take a stand against the propaganda of those with hidden agendas. Let's not let the government or special interest groups dictate our rights based on flawed and subjective information.

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