

Reducing Risk Associated with Tobacco Addiction

While not risk-free, switching completely to lower-risk nicotine alternatives reduces exposure to deadly chemicals

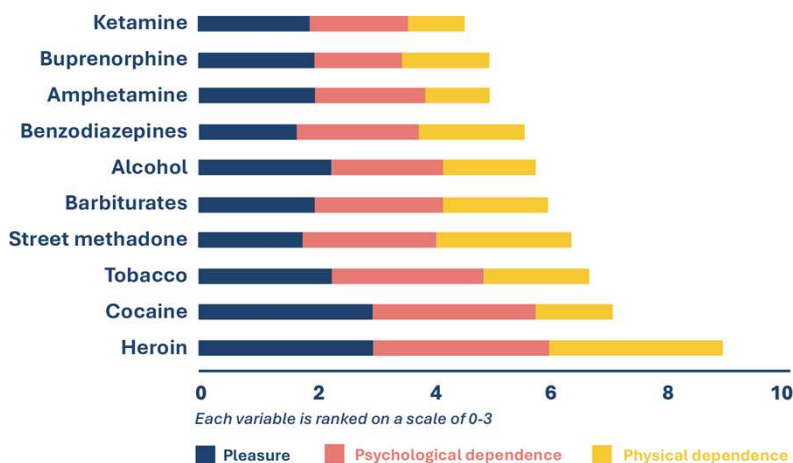
Tobacco use is identified by the World Health Organization as the leading preventable cause of early death.¹ Each year, more than 7 million people worldwide die from tobacco use, including about 46,000 in Canada. This exceeds deaths from alcohol and illicit drugs combined.² Nicotine is the main active ingredient in cigarettes and is one of the most addictive substances. While the nicotine drives addiction, most of the harm caused by smoking comes from the thousands of other chemicals found in tobacco smoke. In Canada, approximately 3.5 million people aged 15 and older currently smoke cigarettes and many struggle to quit due to the strong physical and psychological dependence associated with smoking.

Tobacco Harm Reduction (THR) is an evidence-based approach aimed at reducing the health risks associated with smoking combustible cigarettes.

Instead of requiring people to quit nicotine entirely, THR focuses on minimizing exposure to the most harmful elements of tobacco use, particularly with combustion. With the rapid growth of non-combustible nicotine products, there is an opportunity for adults who smoke to switch to alternatives that may carry lower health risks. (Figure 2)

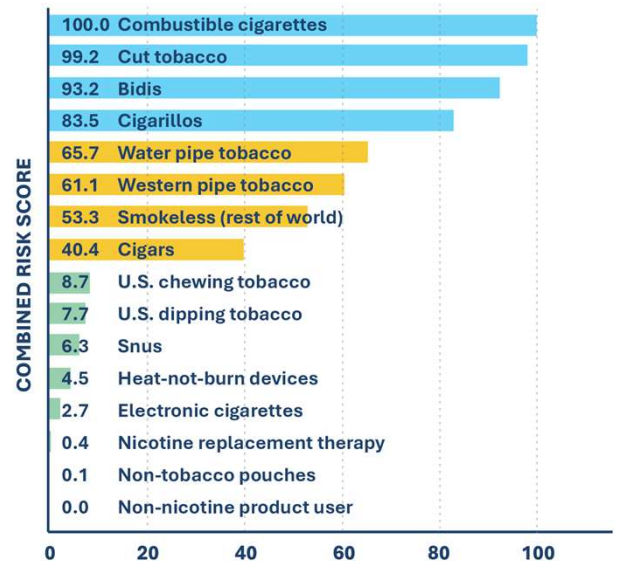
Approved cessation therapies—like nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) and varenicline (Champix)—can at least double quit rates. However, NRT delivers nicotine slowly and doesn't address psychological dependence. Some THR products, particularly nicotine e-cigarettes, show promise as more effective long-term cessation tools than traditional NRT.⁴ For people who haven't succeeded with other approved methods, alternatives like e-cigarettes or non-tobacco nicotine pouches may improve the chances of quitting for good.

FIGURE 1. Top 10 Addictive Substances*



*Data are from: Nutt et al. Lancet. 2007; Graphic: Skye Gould/Tech Insider

FIGURE 2. The Relative Risk Spectrum of Nicotine Products



1. World Health Organization. Tobacco. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco>

2. IHME. Global Burden of Disease. Deaths attributed to tobacco, alcohol and drugs, World, 2025. <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/substances-risk-factor-vs-direct-deaths>

3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Smoking Cessation. A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2020.

4. Lindson et al. Electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation. Cochrane Database Syst Rev. 2025 Nov 10;11(11):CD010216.

5. The Global State of Tobacco Harm Reduction 2024. <https://gstr.org/resources/thr-reports/the-global-state-of-tobacco-harm-reduction-2024-a-situation-report/>