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Pulse A GUIDE TO HEALTH NEWS FROM *The Oregonian*

Many college kids have hired a hookah

Posted by [Andy Dworkin](#), [The Oregonian](#) September 05, 2008 11:59AM
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Smoking tobacco from a water pipe is a hot trend among U.S. young adults, as judged by a new survey of college students and the proliferation of hookah hangouts.

The survey of 647 [University of Pittsburgh](#) students (mostly white women) more found that 41 percent of them had smoked tobacco from a water pipe at some time in their lives. Nearly a third toked tobacco from a hookah within the previous year. Most of those students planned to smoke again. The study backs up anecdotes that led the American Lung Association to call hookahs "[the first new tobacco use trend of the 21st century.](#)"

[The Pitt study](#) asserts that more than 200 water-pipe shops opened in the United States from 1999 through 2004, especially in college towns. Portland now boasts at least eight hookah cafes.



Recall Alice when she was just small?

Why the sudden popularity of water pipes (with tobacco in them, at least)? Hookahs are easy to smoke: The water lowers the temperature, and purveyors often mix the tobacco with mint, dried fruit or other sweet flavors to moderate the taste. Perhaps more important, the survey found that hookah users believe water pipes are less dangerous and less addictive than cigarettes. More than a third of surveyed hookah users had never smoked a cigarette.

The young smokers could be betting their lives on a bad assumption. There's not great data on the risks of hookah smoking. But those studies that have been completed suggest that [smoking a hookah for 30 to 60 minutes is equivalent to smoking an entire pack of cigarettes](#). The water in hookahs filters out some toxins. But nicotine, tar and other chemicals get through. Cells lining a hookah smoker's mouth show genetic damage similar to cigarette smokers, and hookah users risk heart disease and cancer. Since groups of social smokers often share a mouthpiece, [the American Cancer Society notes](#) they can pass infectious diseases, too, including tuberculosis and the bug that causes ulcers. On a more mundane level, [doctors have reported](#) seeing college kids with hoarse voices, coughs, sore throats and racing hearts from hookah use.

Bottom line: If you smoke a hookah, don't think it's safer than cigarettes. They may just be two doors to the same hospice.

-- [Andy Dworkin](#), andydworkin@news.oregonian.com

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