

Hooked on Hookahs?

By John R. Goodman BS RRRT

In 1862 the Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was taking a small group of young girls on a lovely afternoon's boat ride near Oxford, England. He knew these young ladies through friendships with their parents. There were 3 young girls on the boat with Reverend Dodgson. Their names were Edith (8), Lorina (13), and Alice (10) Liddell.

To help pass the time for the 5 mile boat ride, Reverend Dodgson told the trio of sisters the adventures of a bored little girl named Alice. The sisters loved the story and begged Reverend Dodgson to please write down the story with young Alice herself pushing the hardest for the story's completion. About 2 years later, Reverend Dodgson using the pen-name Lewis Carroll handed Alice Liddell the first hand written copy of "Alice's Adventures Underground." When it was published the next year it became finalized as "Alice in Wonderland."

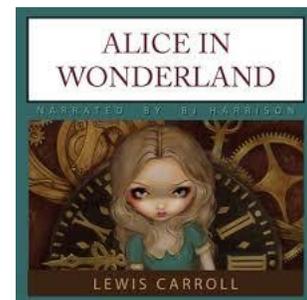
It would be hard to imagine there is still someone alive today who does not know of Alice's many amazing adventures, and also of some of the most incredible characters ever introduced into the world of fiction. Perhaps you saw the wonderful job Walt Disney did in bringing Alice and all her characters to the big screen in 1951. This slightly unusual introduction allows me to re-introduce one of the more colorful characters that Alice met very early in her travels. It was the famous Hookah smoking caterpillar, and the subject of this month's discussion is Hookah smoking!



It takes a pretty fertile imagination to conjure up a hookah smoking caterpillar.



Charles Lutwidge Dodgson also known as Lewis Carroll. (1832-1898)



There seems little doubt that Carroll's Alice was Alice Liddell.

Most people who live in North America and most of Western Europe are not terribly familiar with Hookah smoking. In fact, except for certain cities across North America with large populations of Middle Eastern, African, or Indian residents, Hookah smoking may be viewed as something of a novelty. A little history may be in order here.

Although Hookah smoking would seem to be “thousands” of years old, it is really a fairly modern phenomenon. In fact, it can be traced back to use in India in the mid 1500’s. While it may be thought that Hookahs are used to smoke primarily Marijuana, Hashish, or even Opium, nothing could be further from the truth. It is true almost any combustible substance can be smoked through a Hookah. Traditionally “Shisha” is the most common substance smoked through a standard Hookah. Hookah’s may have a single “line’ or may have up to 5 or 6. It is designed so that the Shisha is consumed over a longer period of time, and in much more of a social setting. This period of time can range from 20 to 60 minutes or more.



Hookah smoking very prevalent
In the Middle East



Hookah with one pipe



Shisha= tobacco soaked with sweet flavors

It is interesting to note that there is almost no written evidence of Hookah smoking until about the 1560’s. This makes sense when you think that tobacco was not indigenous to Europe or the middle east and had to be imported from the yet to be organized United States of America. In the Middle Eastern and other countries with large Arabic populations people tend to smoke their hookahs as an important part of their history and culture. An overwhelming majority of cafes in the Middle East offer Hookah smoking. In fact, Shisha cafes are somewhat analogous to the British pub on nearly every corner of England. Hookah smoking has spread throughout many parts of the world. Hookah smoking became very popular in the United States in the 1960’s and 70’s. It is estimated that there are over 1,000 Hookah bars currently doing business in the United States.

There are a number of major studies currently being conducted in the United States regarding the effects of regular Hookah smoking. It is already known that Hookah use by high school and college students is dramatically increasing. It has been determined that about 17% of male high school seniors and 15% of female seniors had used a hookah in the past 30 days. More encompassing studies have proven that the range of routine Hookah smoking among U.S. college students is between 22 and 40%. Now, with the addition of electronic hookah smoking, scientific information on the effect of the vapors, chemicals and other by-products are more important than ever.

The Hookah “social” connection.

From the very beginning Hookah smoking has been done more in groups rather than individually. Not unlike meeting friends for a cup of coffee after work, or perhaps a glass of wine, in many cases the same mouthpiece is passed from person to person. Hookah is called

different things in the different countries where it is smoked. Other common names include *argileh*, *narghile*, *goza*, and *hubble-bubble*.

Unlike cigarette smoking, smoking Shisha is rarely done alone. This is why many medical practitioners, as well as public health organizations such as the American Lung Association have been doing their best to alert the public as much as possible to the deleterious side effects of Shisha smoking. For the most part, Hookah bars continue to be unregulated. So just as we have discussed and in some cases exploded common myths surrounding the use of continuous supplemental oxygen, we need to place Hookah smoking in the same context. Let's look at some of the common myths regarding Hookah smoking that are still prevalent today.



Hookah smoking has a long history



A casual hookah meeting



Hookah smoking not just for the guys

Myth #1- Since the Shisha is filtered through water; all of the harmful ingredients are filtered out too.

In fact....Obviously, smoking tobacco though any type of liquid does **not** filter out any cancer causing chemicals. Water filtered smoke causes the *same* damage to both the lungs and heart as cigarette smoke does.

Myth #2- Since inhaled Hookah smoke does not actually burn the lungs; it is not as unhealthy as cigarette smoke.

In fact....the fact that the smoke is cooled through the water bath does **nothing** to decrease the number and percentage of carcinogens and is every bit as unhealthy as cigarette smoke.

Myth #3- Smoking through a Hookah is less addictive than smoking cigarettes because there is no nicotine.

In fact....Shisha, just like tobacco does contain nicotine which is not filtered out by the water. Also, in a typical 60 minute Hookah session, a smoker is exposed to 100-200 times the volume of smoke inhaled from a single cigarette...

Myth #4- Shisha tobacco contains fruit, so it is healthier for people who smoke cigarettes.

In fact....tobacco is tobacco no matter what it is mixed with. Shisha tobacco is often mixed with fruit and soaked in molasses or honey. None of this negates the fact that the tobacco still contains the cancer causing tobacco chemicals and nicotine.

Myth #5- Smoking from a Hookah is healthier than smoking cigarettes.

In fact....Hookah smoke is every bit as dangerous as smoke from a cigarette. Although the smoke is generated in different ways, the end product is exactly the same...smoke containing both nicotine and hundreds of known carcinogens.

If indeed hundreds or maybe thousands of new Hookah smoking establishments are to be opened in the upcoming years, here are a few more points worth mentioning and given serious consideration. We already know the chemical makeup of the typical cigarette down to its most basic components. So compared to cigarette smoke, hookah smoke has higher levels of arsenic, lead, and nickel. Hookah smoke contains 36 times more tar and 15 times more carbon monoxide than cigarettes.

This is due to a couple of things Hookah smokers do that cigarette smokers do not do. Smoking a hookah through a long attached pipe or hose requires the user to take a deeper drag. This increases the levels of nicotine and carcinogens that make it down to the deepest recesses of the lungs. Also, since a typical hookah session with friends at a Hookah bar may take 45-60 minutes the hookah user can expose his/her lungs to the same amount of tar and nicotine as one package of 20 cigarettes. It is easy to overlook the possible effects of secondhand smoke even if you yourself refrain from smoking, since typically you will be sitting with a large group of friends in a small confined place. Finally, since Hookah smoking is very often shared with friends and family, there is a tendency to simply share the same pipe and therefore the mouth piece without washing in between users. This can certainly lead to the increased risk of spreading colds, flu, infections and yes, even oral herpes.

Can we peer through the smoky veil of Hookah smoke to see what is looming on the horizon? Well yes, yes we can. Electronic cigarettes have been commercially available in the United States since 2007. Initially marketed to help people actually quit smoking cigarettes, they are also known as e-cigs or "vapes." E-cigs contain nicotine which only takes 20-30 seconds to make its way to the brain. This mimics the effects of smoking in terms of nicotine delivery and addiction. It was just a matter of time and opportunity that led to the latest in delivery systems known as the "Hookah Pen." Remember that Hookah devices are burning a manipulated tobacco product (Shisha) in addition to nicotine. The American Lung Association has stated publically that hookahs are not safe alternatives to smoking cigarettes.

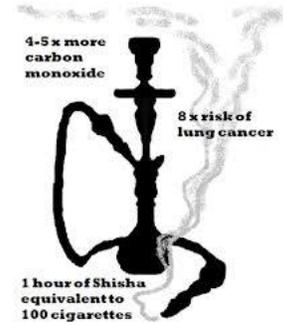
There are several obvious areas of concern. The first is most obvious and even insidious. E-cigs proclaim to help or aid patients who want to cut back or quit smoking cigarettes completely. In fact, there is absolutely no evidence to support this claim in any way. Another claim made by manufacturers of e-cigs, hookah pens etc. is that the effects of second hand smoke can be significantly decreased. To date, there is no solid data to support this contention in either way.



Let's go Hookah shopping!



Decision made....



Just like with cigarettes
No one pays attention to warnings

Clearly more research is needed to support this and other claims. Finally, and perhaps most concerning is the very real possibility of selling these devices (especially hookah pens) to minors. In fact, a case could be made to suggest that e-cigs, or hookah pens might actually introduce a minor into the culture of cigarette smoking, at least in terms of the social setting. The same aggressive legislation that has been passed over the years to protect children from cigarette smoke are simply not yet in place regarding e-cigarettes or hookah pen type devices.



Hundreds of Hookah lounges scattered around the U.S.



A cold beer and a pipe? Hookah pens.....E-cigarette



On the surface it would seem that any “cigarette” that does not deliver the tars, toxins, and hundreds of chemicals (many carcinogenic) should lower the risks of cancer and other pulmonary ailments. But without the long term, peer reviewed studies on the effects of e-cigs the risks of this behavior are simply unknown. Couple this with the fact that many of the e-cigs and hookah pens are manufactured in China, and it adds another layer in the area of quality control. It is probably more than incidental that the original e-cigarette was invented in China in 1963.

It is still a bit early to decide if Hookah bars or cafes are just a fad or the next big thing here in the United States. They are gaining popularity among college age individuals. In many parts of the United States Hookah bars are coming under the broader banner of “smoke free environments.” Time, further study, and public opinion will determine what if any specific legislation may need to be enacted to protect both public and patron alike.