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## HEALTH JOURNAL

# The Case for Smokeless Tobacco

By KEVIN HELLIKER

March 27, 2007; Page D1

If you want to quit smoking, consider chewing.

To date smokers have had little guidance on how to give up cigarettes. But public-health officials in growing numbers are suggesting that a pinch of smokeless tobacco between the lip and gum can provide a smoker with nicotine -- the addictive agent in tobacco -- while posing a substantially reduced health risk compared with smoking. And they say that if smokers are going to make the switch, they should use smokeless products that are low in nitrosamines -- the carcinogens in smokeless tobacco. But users have no way of knowing which products are low in nitrosamines, because that information isn't included on labels.

### LISTEN TO THE PODCAST



Kevin Helliker explains how smokeless tobacco may help smokers reduce the health risks of tobacco use. [Listen Now.](#)

Scientific studies increasingly are distinguishing one product from another. A presentation last month

at the annual scientific conference of the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco corroborates other recent research showing that the level of carcinogens in smokeless tobacco varies widely from brand to brand.

Consider two brands -- Copenhagen and Revel -- from the same maker, UST Inc. A gram of Copenhagen, one of the nation's most popular brands, has 4.8 micrograms of nitrosamines, compared with 0.99 microgram in Revel, a relatively new brand packaged in individual pouches, according to the SRNT presentation, given by University of Minnesota's Dorothy Hatsukami, who has no financial ties to the tobacco industry.

The carcinogenic level of smokeless tobacco is drawing scientific attention in part because sales of this product are growing, unlike sales of cigarettes. A larger reason is the debate over its use as a cigarette-cessation aid. Low-nitrosamine smokeless tobacco poses 10% or less of the health risks of cigarettes, according to various studies, including a 2004 National Cancer Institute-funded article.

Some health officials worry that promoting snuff as a cigarette cessation aid would induce nonsmokers to take up smokeless tobacco, which

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**Smokeless tobacco products low in nitrosamines are harder to find than traditional brands.**

over 20 years than smokers who quit tobacco altogether.

The study didn't compare switchers with people who kept smoking, but the researchers say the differences would be significant. "There's no question that switching to spit tobacco and quitting tobacco altogether are both far less lethal than continuing to smoke," says Michael Thun, vice president of epidemiology for the American Cancer Society and an author of the Tobacco Control article.

The tobacco industry, cautious about making any health claims for its smokeless products, generally doesn't comment on scientific reports about them.

In Sweden, where use of smokeless tobacco is popular and low-nitrosamine brands predominate, studies have found little or no elevated risk of mouth cancer.

Among various brands available in the U.S., one general conclusion is that lower levels of nitrosamines are found in smokeless tobacco packaged in pouches. A pioneer of these pouches, which resemble tiny tea bags, is [Swedish Match AB](#) of Sweden.

In Dr. Hatsukami's study, a gram of Swedish Match's General Snus had two micrograms of nitrosamines. She found lower amounts in new pouched products from the nation's largest cigarette makers: A gram of Taboka brand from [Altria Group](#)'s Philip Morris contained 1.27 micrograms, while [Reynolds American](#)'s Camel Snus contained 1.12 micrograms.

Not only do pouches contain lower levels of nitrosamines, but users may consume fewer overall grams because of the limited amount of tobacco in each pouch -- usually a gram or less. Low-nitrosamine products aren't necessarily low in nicotine, so users may get an adequate fix. The tobacco product with the lowest level of nitrosamines -- 0.19 microgram per gram -- appears to be Star Scientific Inc.'s Ariva, a lozenge that dissolves in the mouth.

Final note: Smokeless tobacco products cost less than nicotine replacement therapies such as gum. But the gums and patches remain the safest alternative to cigarettes, public-health officials say.

can be as addictive as cigarettes. And smokeless tobacco isn't without risks. Findings from a federally funded study of over 100,000 smokers, published last month in the journal Tobacco Control, showed that smokers who switched to smokeless tobacco had an 8% higher mortality rate

## COMPANIES

Dow Jones, Reuters

### UST Inc. (UST)

PRICE	57.12
CHANGE	-0.50
	1:45p.m.

### Swedish Match AB (SWMA.SK)

PRICE	125.50
CHANGE	1.50
	12:00a.m.

### Altria Group Inc. (MO)

PRICE	85.09
CHANGE	0.14
	1:46p.m.

### Reynolds American Inc. (RAI)

PRICE	61.65
CHANGE	0.02
	1:46p.m.

\* At Market Close

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## Taking a Dip

A look at the content of various brands of smokeless tobacco:

Product/Maker	Package Content	Nitrosamine Level <sup>2</sup>	Availability
<b>General Snus</b> Swedish Match AB	24 pouches	2 micrograms	Online, plus 100 stores listed on Web site
<b>Copenhagen</b> UST Inc.	Loose tobacco	4.8 micrograms	Convenience stores, pharmacies
<b>Tabaka</b> Philip Morris USA	12 pouches	1.27 micrograms	Indianapolis (test market)
<b>Camel Snus</b> R.J. Reynolds	20 pouches	1.12 micrograms	Austin, Texas, and Portland, Ore. (test markets)
<b>Revel</b> UST Inc.	20 pouches	0.99 microgram	Test market in Colorado
<b>Ariva</b> Star Scientific Inc.	20 compressed tobacco lozenges	0.19 microgram	CVS and Rite Aid drugstore chains, sometimes besides nicotine gum

<sup>2</sup>Per gram of tobacco

Source: Dorothy Hatsukami, University of Minnesota

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