

Top Facts: Menthol Cigarettes

Why Menthol?

- Menthol is a mild anesthetic that numbs your throat and stimulates cold receptors that create a cooling sensation.
- Because your throat is numb, you can take a bigger drag of tobacco smoke and hold it in your lungs longer.
- Because you hold it longer in your lungs, it increases the addictiveness of the nicotine, though menthol by itself is not addictive in nature.

Menthol Cigarettes vs. Normal Cigarettes

- Because tobacco smoke is in your lungs longer, the 60-plus known cancer-causing chemicals in cigarettes⁴ stay there longer, too.
- If you smoke menthol cigarettes, you may be exposed to levels of toxic and cancer-causing agents are 300% higher if you smoke regular cigarettes with the same nicotine content.¹
- Menthol cigarettes contain higher concentrations of carbon monoxide than regular cigarettes and may facilitate greater absorption of nicotine in your body.²
- This intensifies the addictive affects of the nicotine.⁶

African Americans and Menthol Cigarettes

- Before cigarette billboards were outlawed in 1998, there were more than twice as many cigarette billboards in predominately African-American neighborhoods than in predominately Caucasian neighborhoods.⁵
- Almost two-thirds of the cigarette ads in African-American publications are for menthol cigarettes compared to 15.4% of cigarettes ads in other magazines.⁵
- Target advertising using African-American themes and images made the Kool brand of menthol cigarette the top among African-Americans in the 1960s and Newport the top brand in the 1990s.⁵
- Today, 75% of all African-American smokers (and over 60% of African-American youth) choose menthol cigarettes, compared to 25% of all Caucasians.²
- Death from lung cancer and other smoking-related diseases is higher among African-Americans than Caucasians—even though African-Americans smoke fewer cigarettes a day and begin smoking later in life.²

Following the success in the African-American market, the Tobacco Industry is now targeting Asian and Pacific Islander Americans, young adults, and once again, women.³

Recent Findings on Menthol Cigarettes

- Nearly half of smokers between the ages 12-17 favor menthol cigarettes.⁶
- Researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health recently reported that the Tobacco Industry employed "a deliberate strategy to recruit and addict young smokers by adjusting menthol to create a milder experience for the first-time smoker."⁶

¹ National Association of American Americans for Positive Imagery. (2000). Menthol in cigarettes. Retrieved August 16, 2006 from http://www.naaapi.org/documents/menthol_factsht.asp

² California Black Health Network. (2005). American Americans and menthol cigarettes. Retrieved August 16, 2006 from <http://www.cbhn.org/pdf/Menthol.pdf>

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2003). The first conference on Menthol Cigarettes Executive Summary. Retrieved August 16, 2006 from http://dccps.nci.nih.gov/tcrb/MentholExecSumRprt4_10-16.pdf

⁴ Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. Tobacco Information and Prevention Source (TIPS), National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Toxic chemicals in tobacco products. Retrieved August 16, 2006 from http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/research_data/product/objective21-20.htm

⁵ Lynn, Sherry. (2001). Menthol: Urban legend or weapon for genocide? Retrieved August 16, 2006 from http://whitelies.tv/files/news/NewsBriefs_44.pdf

⁶ Medical News Today. (2008). Tobacco Industry Manipulated Cigarette Menthol Content To Recruit New Smokers Among Young People. Retrieved July 28, 2008 from <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/115366.php>