

ZYN & NICOTINE POUCHES

What Every Hockey Player Should Actually Know

2x IN 1 YEAR

Past-30-day nicotine pouch use among 10th and 12th graders **doubled from 1.3% to 2.6%** between 2023 and 2024. Locker rooms aren't the exception here — they're part of the trend.^{1,2}

This isn't a hypothetical for your team. It's already in the room. Here's what the pouch actually does to your body once it hits your bloodstream — and what that means for your next shift, not just your long-term health.

HOW IT ACTUALLY HITS YOUR SYSTEM

Nicotine absorbs straight through your cheek lining into blood vessels — no lungs, no liver first-pass. It reaches your brain in **5–10 minutes**, faster than most people expect from something you just tuck under your lip.³ **Triggering an almost immediate adrenaline surge: heart rate up, blood pressure up, blood vessels narrowed — your body's fight-or-flight response**, fired on command.^{3,4}

WHY IT MEANS FOR HOCKEY PLAYERS

01 REDUCES REPEATED SHIFT CAPACITY

Narrowed vessels mean less oxygen-rich blood reaching your legs and glutes — the exact system a 45-second shift and a fast change rely on.

02 INCREASES CORE TEMP

Nicotine blunts skin blood flow, your body's main way to dump heat. Add pads, a helmet, and a warm rink or dryland session — core temp and dehydration risk climb faster than expected.⁴

03 SLOWS BETWEEN SHIFT RECOVERY

Impaired blood flow to muscle during your bench or intermission rest slows exactly the recovery hockey's stop-start structure is built around.

04 RAISE HEART RATE & INTENSITY FEELING

The nicotine-driven HR/BP spike stacks on top of a heart rate that's already near max during game intensity.³

THE “FOCUS” CLAIM – ADDRESSED HONESTLY

Plenty of players use it for perceived pre-game focus, and the claim isn't nothing — nicotine does trigger real alertness and motor-response changes.^{3,4} But the research on whether that translates into actual on-ice performance is mixed at best: some trials show small gains in attention and motor speed, others show none, and most of this data comes from adult, non-athlete populations tested in a lab, not a rink.^{5,6} The honest version isn't “it doesn't work” — it's that **the tradeoff isn't what it's sold as**. Any focus bump is competing directly against reduced blood flow, faster heat buildup, and a heart rate that's already working overtime.

WHAT DOESN'T SHOW UP ON A STAT SHEET

IT'S ADDICTIVE - HARD TO GIVE UP

Your prefrontal cortex — the part that governs impulse control and decision-making — isn't done developing until around 25. Nicotine hits that still-forming circuitry harder, and dependence builds faster than it will later in life.^{7,8}

IT AFFECTS YOUR SLEEP AND FULLY RECOVER

Nicotine is a stimulant — using it late in the day disrupts sleep onset and quality, the same recovery window your training block depends on. Most competitive levels, including WADA, place smokeless nicotine on a monitored watch list as a discouraged performance substance, even though it isn't currently a banned one.^{9,10}

BOTTOM LINE

A pouch might buy you a few minutes of alertness. What it actually costs on the ice is blood flow to the muscles doing the work, your body's ability to shed heat under full gear, and the recovery your legs need between shifts and periods — while building a dependence your brain is still wiring itself around. That's a bad trade for a guy trying to be faster in the third period.

SOURCES

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