Tobacco is packed with harmful and addictive substances. Scientific evidence has shown conclusively that all forms of tobacco cause health problems throughout life, frequently resulting in death or disability. Smokers have markedly increased risks of multiple cancers, particularly lung cancer, and are at far greater risk of heart disease, strokes, emphysema and many other fatal and non-fatal diseases. If they chew tobacco, they risk cancer of the lip, tongue and mouth.

Women suffer additional health risks. Smoking in pregnancy is dangerous to the mother as well as to the foetus, especially in poor countries where health facilities are inadequate. Maternal smoking is not only harmful during pregnancy, but has long-term effects on the baby after birth. This is often compounded by exposure to passive smoking from the mother, father or other adults smoking.

While tobacco kills millions more than it helps, research is underway examining any possible health benefits of nicotine and also trying to find a safe use for tobacco, particularly in the field of genetic modification. The aim is to produce vaccines or human proteins for medical use, or even to clean up soil that has been contaminated with explosives.