

THE BIG PICTURE BY THE NUMBERS:

How Tobacco Affects Oregon Youth and Families.



YOU'RE NOT ALONE, AND YOU'RE NOT POWERLESS.

Across Oregon, more and more young people and families are choosing to break free from smoking and vaping. Whether you're a teen trying to quit, a parent who wants to help their child, or someone trying to quit for your family's future — this is for you.

Quitting isn't easy, especially when nicotine was designed to hook you. But it's possible. And it starts with knowledge, support, and the belief that a better life, a freer life, is worth fighting for.

HOW NICOTINE ADDICTION HOOKS YOU

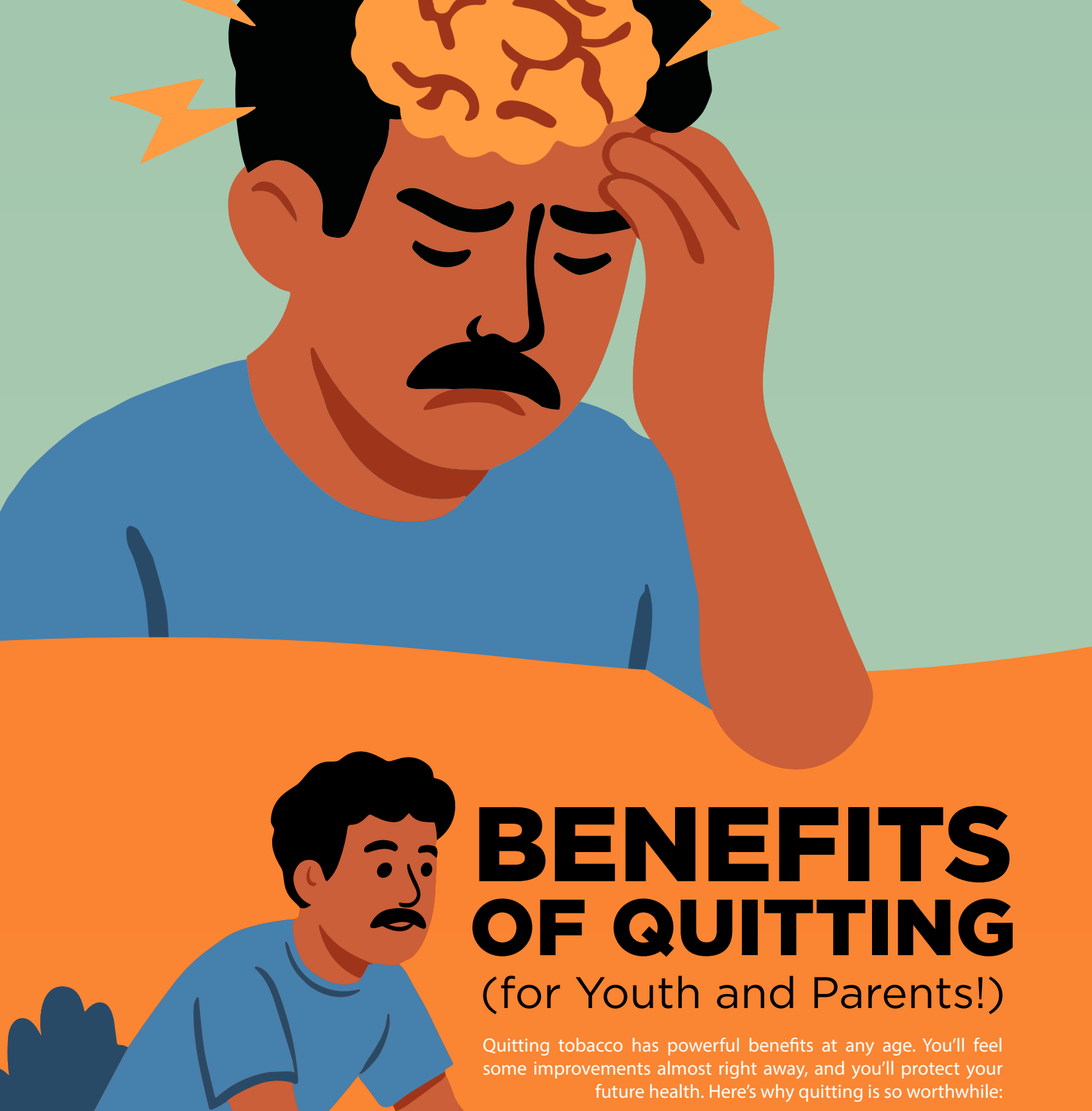
Nicotine addiction develops when your brain and body come to depend on regular doses of nicotine. This can happen quickly in teens — sometimes even before daily use has begun. Here's how it works and how it feels:

Brain Effects: Nicotine triggers the release of "feel-good" chemicals (like dopamine) in the brain, giving a temporary sense of relief or pleasure. Over time, the brain gets used to these nicotine hits. The result: you need nicotine just to feel "normal" and avoid feeling bad. Many experts say nicotine can be as addictive as heroin or cocaine for the brain. And because teen brains are still maturing, youth can get addicted with smaller amounts of nicotine than adults might.

Signs of Addiction: Someone addicted to nicotine will feel strong cravings and find it hard to stop using tobacco or vapes. They may need more and more over time (developing tolerance) and feel anxious or irritable when they can't vape or smoke. It can affect their mood and concentration, and even relationships or school performance. Many high school students who vape report they want to quit but struggle to break free of nicotine.

Stress and Mood: Many people, adults and youth alike, think smoking or vaping helps them cope with stress or feel happier. In reality, nicotine is making the stress worse. It may give a brief calming effect, but as soon as it wears off, it leaves the person more anxious or down, creating cravings for another "fix". Quitting can break this cycle. In fact, people who quit smoking report lower stress, anxiety and depression levels after their brain is free from nicotine, along with improved mood and quality of life. In short: life gets better emotionally when you're not hooked on nicotine.

Withdrawal: When a nicotine user tries to cut back or quit, they often experience withdrawal symptoms as the body readjusts. These are temporary but can be challenging: irritability or anger, restlessness, trouble focusing, trouble sleeping, increased appetite, feeling down or anxious, and of course strong urges to smoke or vape. Cravings tend to peak and then pass — typically an urge lasts just a few minutes — but in the moment it can feel intense. The good news is that withdrawal gets better with time. Each day without nicotine, your brain heals and adjusts to life without the drug. After a few weeks, the physical symptoms ease up a lot (though psychological habits can take longer to change).



BENEFITS OF QUITTING

(for Youth and Parents!)

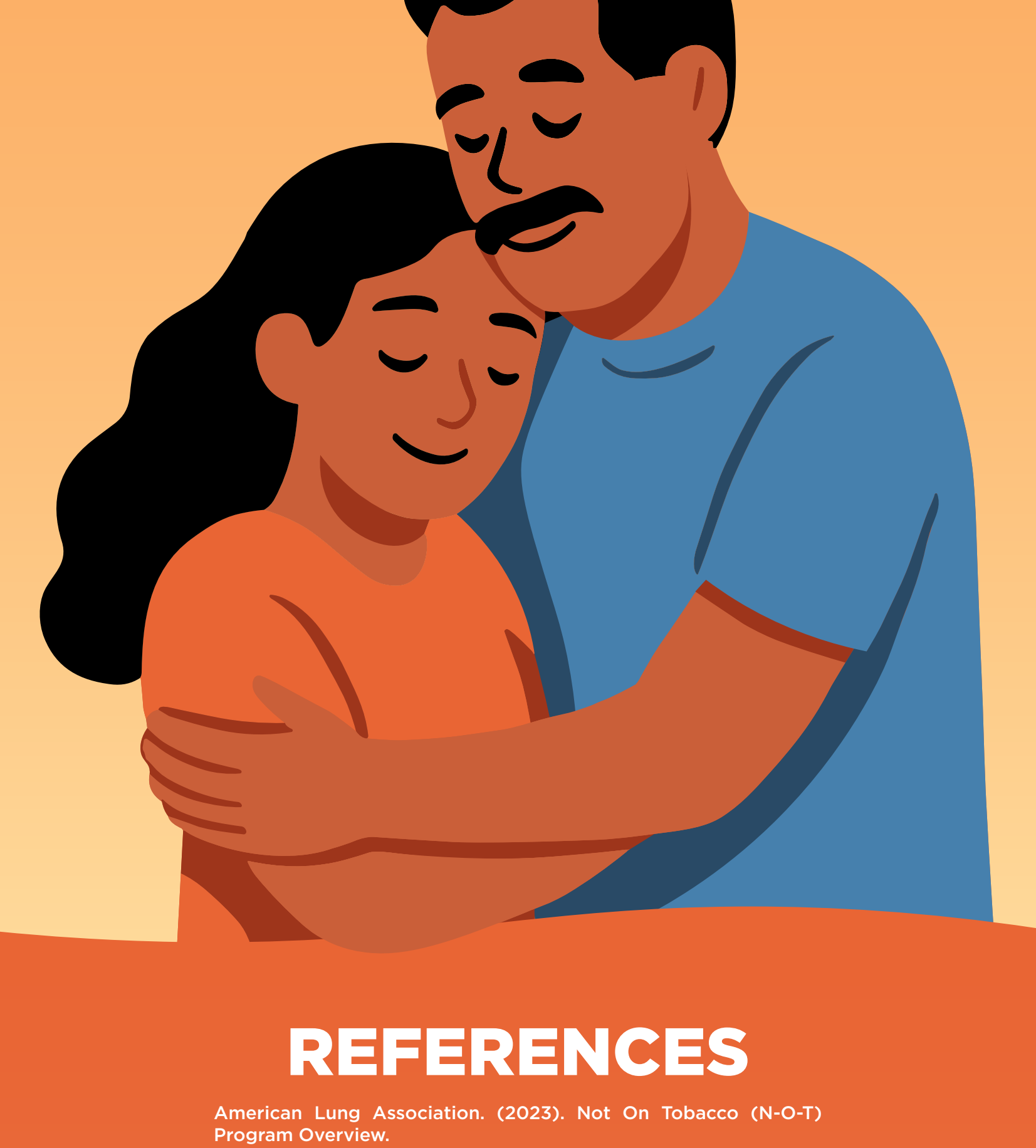
Quitting tobacco has powerful benefits at any age. You'll feel some improvements almost right away, and you'll protect your future health. Here's why quitting is so worthwhile:



Immediate and Short-Term Benefits: Within 20 minutes of your last cigarette, your heart rate and blood pressure begin to drop back to normal. Within a few days, the carbon monoxide level in your blood normalizes, meaning your blood can carry oxygen better. After around 2 weeks, your circulation improves and your lung function begins to increase. You might notice you're breathing easier when you run or play sports. As your lungs clear out tar and mucus, coughing and shortness of breath decrease over the next couple of months. Many people also notice food tastes and smells better after quitting smoking for a short time, since your senses recover. If you quit vaping, you may find your throat and lungs feel less irritated within weeks. Importantly, your mental health often improves: one study found that 90% of smokers felt less stressed, anxious, or depressed just six weeks after quitting. This is likely because their brains' chemistry stabilized and they no longer had the constant withdrawal cycle causing stress. Quitting is tough at first, but these early improvements show that your body starts healing within days of stopping tobacco.

Long-Term Health Benefits: Staying tobacco-free for the long haul greatly reduces your risk of serious diseases. Quitting smoking can add years to your life. For example, a person who quits by age 40 gains up to 10 years of life expectancy compared to if they kept smoking. Former smokers have a much lower risk of lung cancer than those who continue; after 10 years off cigarettes, the risk of dying from lung cancer is cut in half. Risks of cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, and others also drop. Quitting lowers the chance of heart disease, heart attack, and stroke; within 1 year of quitting, the excess risk of coronary heart disease is reduced by 50%. Lung function continues to improve for years after quitting, especially for younger quitters whose lungs can recover more completely. Quitting also helps you avoid chronic diseases like COPD (emphysema/bronchitis), and if you already have breathing issues or asthma, it can prevent them from getting worse. In women, quitting before or during pregnancy improves the chances of a healthy baby and avoids nicotine's harm to the fetus. No matter how long you've been using tobacco, quitting is beneficial — even people who smoked heavily for years see health improvements when they stop. And for teens who quit now, it's especially impactful: you break the addiction early and set yourself up for a much healthier future.

Lifestyle and Financial Benefits: Beyond the medical stats, quitting can improve your daily life in other ways. You'll likely have more energy and stamina once your lungs and heart aren't constantly battling smoke or vape chemicals. Playing sports or even climbing stairs becomes easier as your breathing improves. Your appearance may benefit — people who quit smoking often notice brighter skin, whiter teeth, and fresher breath within weeks. You also save money — both cigarettes and vape supplies are expensive. By quitting, a pack-a-day smoker in Oregon saves around \$2,000+ per year that would have gone up in smoke. Think of what a teen vaper spends on pods or disposables; quitting frees up that cash for better things. Quitting also means no more worrying about when you can sneak in a vape or smoke; you're free from the cravings and the hassle. Finally, by being tobacco-free you're protecting those around you. Family and friends won't be exposed to secondhand smoke or vapor, and you become a positive role model, especially if you're a parent. Overall, quitting smoking or vaping is one of the best investments in your health and happiness. It's never too late (or too early) to quit.



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