

# CIGARETTES

## ARE TOBACCO COMPANIES TARGETING TEENS?

BY LAUREN TARSHIS

**Y**ou've heard it all about smoking:

- Cigarettes kill 400,000 people every year.
- Each puff of a cigarette exposes the body to 400 toxins.
- The nicotine in cigarettes may be as addictive as cocaine or heroin.

You've probably heard about the dangers of smoking from your family and your teachers. The good news is that most of you *get it*. Fewer teens smoke today than at any time since the 1990s.

But here's the bad news: Teen smoking is still a major problem. Every day, nearly 4,000 kids in the United States try a cigarette for the first time. And every day, 1,000 kids become daily smokers. Almost all teen smokers plan to quit within five years. But more than 60 percent are still puffing

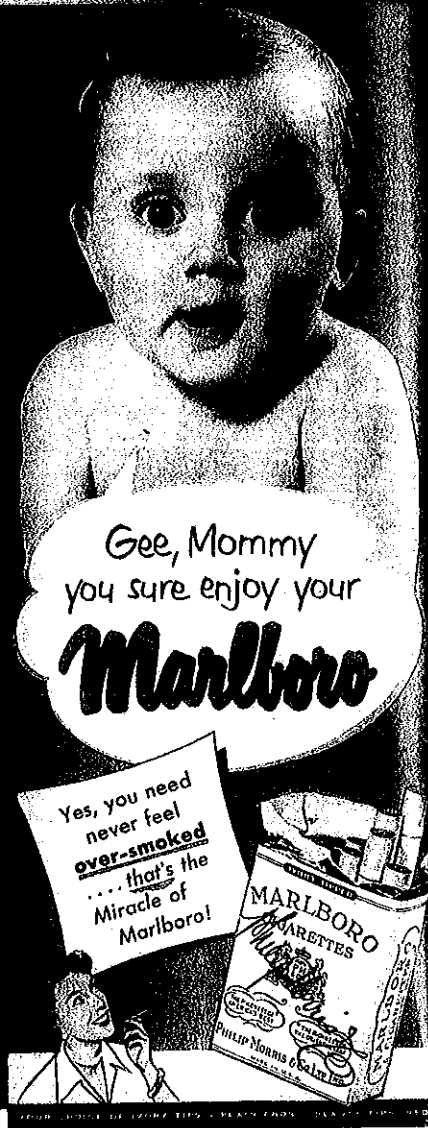
away 7 to 9 years later. Flash forward: Unless smoking rates decline, an estimated 6 million of those kids will be killed by illnesses caused by their smoking.

Most people hope every teen in the world stays away from cigarettes. But not everyone wants this—not the people who work for the companies that make and sell cigarettes. “Tobacco companies know that 90 percent of smokers start in their teens [or earlier],” says Danny McGoldrick, vice president of research at the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. “And they also know how hard it is to quit. So if you can get smokers started early, you can have a customer for a lifetime.”

Many health experts accuse tobacco companies of **deliberately** trying to market to kids and teens. There is powerful evidence suggesting that they are right.

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# SMOKING MAMA



## New Laws

Before people knew that cigarettes were dangerous, tobacco companies openly marketed their products to youths. By the early 1900s, some cigarette packs included collectible baseball cards. In the 1940s and '50s, tobacco advertisements often featured actors and actresses, baseball stars, and even Santa Claus happily puffing away.

That ended in 1964, when the U.S. government released the results of a major scientific study on the health effects of smoking. Research proved what many people already suspected:

Cigarette smoking contributes significantly to cancer and other diseases. New laws banned cigarette advertising from TV and radio.

But tobacco companies continued to find new ways to market their products to young people. A **notorious** example is "Joe Camel," a **suave** cartoon character featured in advertisements for Camel cigarettes. Starting in the late 1980s, Joe Camel's smiling face seemed to appear everywhere, from billboards to baseball caps. The R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, which makes Camel cigarettes, denied that the

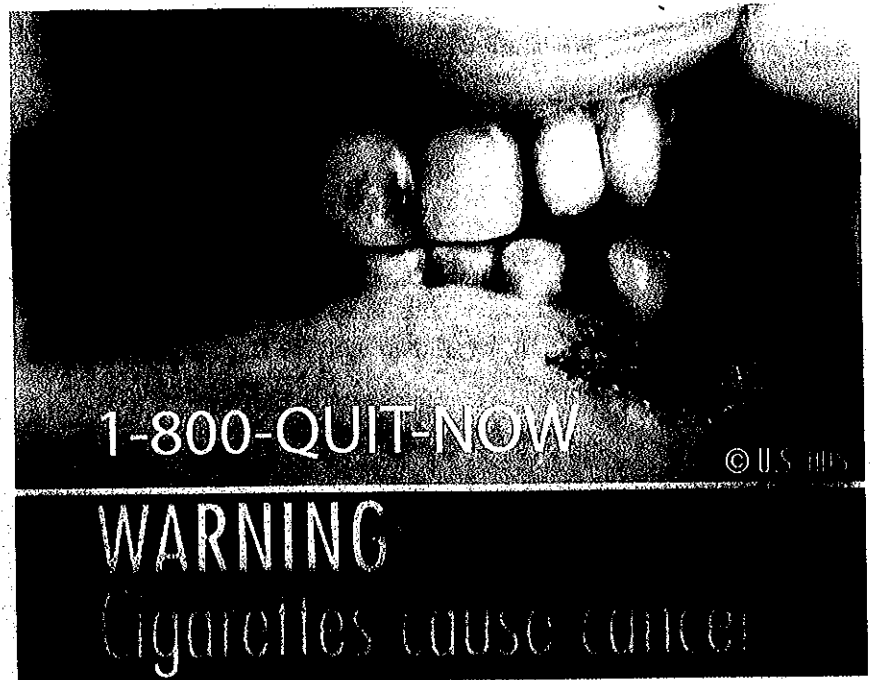
fun-loving cartoon camel was supposed to appeal to kids. But by the early 1990s, Joe Camel was as well known to 6-year-olds as Mickey Mouse was. In 1997, the U.S. government charged that the Joe Camel campaign **violated** the ban on cigarette marketing aimed at children. Though the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company **adamantly** denied this claim, Joe was finally retired later that year.

## Candy Cigarettes

Advertising isn't the only way tobacco companies have tried to make cigarettes appealing to young people. Candy-flavored cigarettes were once common.

# FIGHTING BACK

Anti-smoking groups have created dozens of powerful ads showing the ugly side of smoking. Do ads like this work? (See more of these online!)



They contained toxic chemicals and were every bit as dangerous and addictive as regular cigarettes, but the tobacco was flavored to make the smoke taste like chocolate, bubble gum, and other candy treats. Studies showed that these products were especially popular among teen smokers. And many teens mistakenly believed that these sweet smokes were safer than unflavored cigarettes.

Once again, the tobacco companies firmly denied that they were trying to attract teen smokers. But the U.S. government disagreed. In 2009, flavored cigarettes were banned in the United States.

## They Don't Give Up

By now, maybe you're noticing a pattern: Each time new laws are passed to protect teens, tobacco companies come up with new **tactics**. Laws keep getting tougher, but the companies have not given up. Many states have approved high taxes on cigarettes; and high prices have been shown to reduce smoking, especially among teens. To **counteract** this, tobacco companies give discounts to convenience stores so they can charge less for cigarettes.

Tobacco companies also pay stores to display cigarettes at eye level, so you can't help noticing

them when you're paying for your Milky Way.

And you can be sure that more is to come. As of 2006, the last year for which information is available, tobacco companies spent \$34 million *a day* marketing their products. The fact is that tobacco companies *need* you to get hooked on a deadly habit. Without new smokers, they will eventually go out of business.

But you can at least make sure of one thing: They won't get you.

FOR MORE INFO: [TheTruth.com](http://TheTruth.com)  
FOR HELP QUITTING: [Smokefree.gov](http://Smokefree.gov)  
TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST TOBACCO COMPANIES: [Tobaccofreekids.org](http://Tobaccofreekids.org)