



Dental

How tobacco affects your oral health

Tobacco greatly increases your risk of cancer, heart disease and stroke. But did you know that it is also harmful to your mouth?

When you use tobacco, it affects your oral health in many ways:

- It can give you bad breath
- Your teeth become stained
- You lose your ability to taste
- The roof of your mouth becomes inflamed
- Your risk of tooth decay increases¹

Smoking is also a serious risk factor for gum disease. Nicotine reduces the flow of blood to your gums. This prevents your gums from getting the nutrients they need. Germs, called bacteria, gather around your teeth and gums, and deep pockets form between them. This allows more germs to gather. Without treatment, you eventually lose the bone and tissue that support your teeth.

Tobacco can cause oral cancer, which can lead to death.

More than 37,000 people get oral cancer every year and 8,000 people a year die from it. Only about 50% of people who get oral cancer survive five years or more. Studies show there is a definite link between tobacco and oral cancer. One study showed more than eight out of 10 oral cancer patients are smokers.²

You should know:

- Tobacco causes damage to your teeth and gums.
- It gives you bad breath and discolored teeth.
- Tobacco is linked to mouth cancer and death.
- There is no safe form of tobacco.
- No matter how long you've smoked, your health improves when you quit.

Are cigars or pipes safer than cigarettes?

Cigars and pipe tobacco contain the same harmful ingredients as cigarettes. Smokeless tobacco is snuff, dip or chewing tobacco. It is dangerous because it eats away at your gums and can cause damage to other soft tissues in your mouth such as your cheek, lips, tongue and floor of the mouth. This increases your chances of developing gum disease and oral cancer.

How can I quit?

Talk to your doctor about programs to help you stop tobacco use. See the box at right for tips. No matter how long you've smoked, quit now! It will immediately improve your health, including your oral health.

When you decide to quit:

- Pick a stress-free time
- Ask for help from family and friends
- Start exercising to relieve stress
- Get plenty of rest and eat a healthy diet
- Spend more time in places where smoking is not allowed
- Keep things to eat on hand, like carrots, apples or sugarless gum



¹ "Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General," 2012; <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/preventing-youth-tobacco-use/full-report.pdf>.

² "The Tobacco Connection," Oral Cancer Foundation, <http://oralcancerfoundation.org/tobacco>.

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