



# TOBACCO AND YOUR ORAL HEALTH

Congratulations! By reading this article, you've taken the first step in the right direction. You understand that tobacco can be harmful to your oral health and you want to do something about it.

## How does tobacco use impact my oral health?

If you're a smoker, you've likely seen this warning before.

**“SURGEON GENERAL’S WARNING: Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, Emphysema and May Complicate Pregnancy.”**

Did you know that there are also many oral health complications that tobacco use can cause?

These include:<sup>1</sup>

- › Oral cancer
- › Bad breath
- › Stained teeth and tongue
- › Decreased sense of taste and smell
- › Periodontal (gum) disease
- › Delayed healing

Using tobacco also increases one's risk for periodontal (gum) disease.<sup>2</sup> And gum disease has been associated with numerous medical conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke and more. If you develop gum disease, using tobacco can slow down the healing process<sup>3</sup> and make the treatment results less predictable.<sup>1</sup>

If you use smokeless tobacco (chew), you also have an increased risk for tooth decay. This is because sugar is often added to enhance the flavor. Also, swallowing the juice from smokeless tobacco increases the risks for many other types of cancer – including cancers of the voice box, esophagus, colon and bladder.

## What steps can I take to quit?

**Pick a quit date and have a “Quit Day” plan.**

Here are a few tips to help you make it through your Quit Day.

- › Make sure the day you choose to quit is a low-stress day
- › Avoid places with tobacco or alcohol
- › Develop a personal support system of friends and family
- › Drink plenty of water
- › Keep your hands and mouth busy. For example, chewing gum, eating small, healthy snacks, and playing with a paper clip or pen may help to distract you. But make sure not to play with things in your mouth – doing so could cause damage to your teeth.

**Together, all the way.®**



## Plan how you'll deal with triggers to using tobacco

A trigger is anything in the environment that causes you to respond in a certain way. What will you do when you're angry? When you're bored? When you're with a friend who uses tobacco? At a time when you would usually use tobacco?

## Choose healthy replacements and rewards

When you have the urge for tobacco, try to do something you enjoy – take a walk, chew something, such as carrots or sunflower seeds, or participate in a hobby or sport you love. Make sure to reward yourself with positive things such as massages or lunch with a friend. Or, imagine where you could go on vacation if you put the money you save from not buying tobacco into a jar!

## What are the benefits of quitting?

You'll realize some physical benefits of quitting tobacco immediately, while others may take time. But with patience and determination, your body will become healthier.

Here are just some of the benefits you may experience from quitting.<sup>4</sup>

- › **“Within 20 minutes** – After you smoke that last cigarette, your body begins a series of changes that continue for years.
- › **20 minutes after** – Your heart rate drops.
- › **12 hours after quitting** – Carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal.
- › **Two weeks to three months after quitting** – Your heart attack risk begins to drop. Your lung function begins to improve.
- › **One to nine months after quitting** – Your coughing and shortness of breath decrease.
- › **One year after quitting** – Your added risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a smoker's.

- › **Two to five years after quitting** – Your stroke risk is reduced to that of a nonsmoker's. Your risk of cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus and bladder is halved within five years.
- › **10 years after quitting** – Your lung cancer death rate is about half that of a smoker's. Your risk of cancers of the kidney and pancreas decreases.
- › **15 years after quitting** – Your risk of coronary heart disease is back to that of a nonsmoker's.”

So pick your Quit Day and start your journey to improved oral and overall health. If you need additional motivation, please reach out to a professional trained in tobacco cessation techniques, such as a health care provider, dentist or licensed behavioral health professional. Also, some health plans or employee assistance plans offer tobacco cessation programs that may fit your needs, so give them a call.



**Good luck and, again, congratulations on taking this important step in improving your health.**



1. "Smoking and Tobacco." Mouth Healthy with American Dental Association. Accessed January 2019. <<http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/s/smoking-and-tobacco>>.

2. "Gum Disease Risk Factors." American Academy of Periodontology. Accessed January 2019. <<https://www.perio.org/consumer/risk-factors>>.

3. "Smoking, Gum Disease, and Tooth Loss." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. March 2018. <<http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/diseases/periodontal-gum-disease.html>>.

4. "Benefits of Quitting." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. December 2017. <[http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit\\_smoking/how\\_to\\_quit/benefits/](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/how_to_quit/benefits/)>.

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