



Quitting to boost oral health

Smoking and tobacco product use, may weaken your immune system and make it harder to fight gum infections. Once you have gum damage, smoking may make it harder for gums to heal.

Symptoms of gum disease may include:

- Gums that have pulled away from teeth
- Painful chewing
- Red, swollen or bleeding gums
- Loose teeth
- Sensitive teeth

Gum disease is a major risk of smoking and tobacco use, but it isn't the only side effect. Smoking and smokeless tobacco may also lead to a number of other oral health issues, such as oral cancers, tooth decay, mouth pain, bad breath, stained teeth and tooth loss.

You may also experience longer healing time after oral surgery, and gum disease may limit your options for certain types of dental care, such as tooth implants.

Regular visits to the dentist for checkups and cleanings are fundamental to making your smile last, and for preventing tooth decay and gum disease and detecting cancer early. During a dental exam, your dentist will check for sores that don't heal, red or white patches, or any other irregularities that could be signs of cancer.

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THERE ARE 12,000 DEATHS A YEAR IN THE U.S. FROM ORAL CANCER.¹



SMOKING MAY WEAKEN YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM.



SMOKING MAY MAKE IT HARDER TO FIGHT GUM INFECTIONS.

Quitting to boost oral health (continued)



HOW TO QUIT

Quitting smoking is crucial for oral health, as tobacco use can lead to various dental issues. Here are several smoking cessation options:

1. Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) —

Patches, gum, lozenges, inhalers and nasal sprays may help reduce withdrawal symptoms and cravings, making it easier to quit. Studies have shown that quitting smoking can lead to significant improvements in gum health and reduce the risk of periodontal disease.²

2. Prescription medications —

Prescription medications can help reduce cravings and withdrawal symptoms. Research indicates that quitting smoking can improve oral health markers, such as reduced plaque and gum inflammation.³

3. Behavioral therapy — Individual counseling, group therapy, or support groups may help address the psychological aspects of addiction. It may lead to long-term cessation, reducing the risk of conditions like oral cancer and enhancing overall oral hygiene practices.⁴

4. Digital apps and resources — There are many smoking cessation apps and online support tools that provide motivation, track progress and offer coping strategies.⁵

5. Acupuncture and alternative therapies —

While evidence is mixed, some studies suggest that these methods can help reduce cravings and anxiety related to quitting smoking.⁶

WHY QUITTING IS IMPORTANT FOR YOUR ORAL HEALTH

Remember, smoking is a major risk factor for gum disease, which may lead to tooth loss and pain.⁶ Smokers are also at a higher risk for oral cancers. Stopping smoking significantly decreases this risk over time.⁶ Smokers often have more plaque and tartar buildup that can lead to decay and gum issues, so it's important to maintain consistent, oral health habits.⁸

Quitting smoking and tobacco products not only benefits overall health, but can significantly improve oral health. Be sure to mention that you smoke or use tobacco products at your next dental visit to determine your risk and to discuss options to help you quit.

¹Oral Cancer Facts, <https://oralcancerfoundation.org/facts>. Accessed November 2024. ²NICE. (2018). "Nicotine replacement therapy: a guideline." National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. ³Stewart, J. et al. (2017). "Impact of smoking cessation on periodontal health." *International Journal of Dental Hygiene*. ⁴Schneider, S. et al. (2020). "Behavioral interventions for smoking cessation." *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*. ⁵Boden, J. M., et al. (2017). "Mobile Apps for Smoking Cessation." *Journal of Medical Internet Research*. ⁶Meyers, R. S. et al. (2018). "Acupuncture for smoking cessation." *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*. ⁷American Cancer Society. (2022). "Cigarette Smoking and Oral Cancers." ⁸Meyer, M. et al. (2020). "The Effect of Smoking on Oral Health." *Journal of Dentistry*.