

Tobacco & Oral Cancer

Frequently Asked Questions



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Tobacco can have serious, harmful effects to your oral health & your overall health. Chronic tobacco use has been proven as a primary cause of oral cancer, where it is estimated to account for **41% of oral cancer cases in men & 11% of oral cancer cases in women.**¹

What is smoking tobacco versus smokeless tobacco?²

Smoking tobacco: Tobacco that is burned in the form of a cigarette, pipe, cigar or cigarillo while the vapours are tasted or inhaled.

Smokeless tobacco (snuff, spit or chewing tobacco): Tobacco that is held between the teeth & cheek then spit out as a tarry substance after it has combined with saliva in the mouth. Smokeless tobacco is **more** harmful than smoking tobacco because it contains more nicotine, is more addictive & can cause permanent jaw bone loss.

What side effects are caused by tobacco use?³

- Lung cancer, oral cancer & other cancers in the body
- Periodontal disease (gum disease)
- Cardiovascular disease (heart disease)
- Chronic bronchitis & emphysema
- Discoloration of the gums, teeth, tongue, lips & fingers
- Nicotine addiction
- Premature aging
- Gum recession & increased jaw bone loss
- Diminished taste & smell perception
- Slower healing after dental work
- Chronic bad breath

What is the link between tobacco & oral cancer?⁴

Tobacco use has been directly linked to increased risk of developing oral cancer because tobacco products contain toxic, cancer-causing agents called carcinogens. When repeatedly exposed to the tissues in the mouth over a period of time, carcinogens in tobacco products can cause mutations to the cells of the mouth which can cause the onset of oral pre-cancer & oral cancer.

Tips to Help you Quit^{2,3}

*Quitting tobacco will lower your risk of oral cancer, heart disease, stroke & periodontal disease. And that's not all—**research has shown that quitting tobacco can add an average of 9 years or more to your life!***

Here are some helpful tips to quitting tobacco:

- Set a date to quit & stick to it
- Talk to your healthcare provider to help you develop a quitting strategy
- Don't be afraid to ask for support
- For the first while, avoid "triggers" to smoking or chewing tobacco to help decrease temptation
- Seek the company of non-smokers
- Discard all tobacco-related paraphernalia from your personal spaces including cigarettes, pipes & ash trays
- Exercise. Increasing physical activity can help you feel better about yourself & distract you from cravings
- Find other ways to keep occupied, such as a new hobby or taking a course to help distract you from your cravings
- Be positive & believe in your plan & yourself
- If you relapse, do not give up! Simply try again until your plan is successful. **You can do it!**



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Sources

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⁴Warnakulasuriya, S. (2004). Smokeless Tobacco and Oral Cancer [Electronic Version]. Oral Diseases, 10(1), 1-4.