

As prevention professionals, dentists and dental hygienists are concerned about the effects of smoking on both oral (dental) and overall health. While the effects of smoking on your lungs, heart and other organs may not be visible the evidence of smoking is easily seen in the mouth. Smokers can expect to develop some combination of the following, depending on the amount and length of time they have smoked:

- Persistent bad breath
- Discoloured teeth (sticky tar deposits leave black staining on the teeth)
- An increase in calculus (tartar) build-up
- Periodontal (gum and bone) disease that may progress more quickly and be more severe than in non-smokers
- Jaw bone loss
- Shifting teeth
- Oral cancers
- Root caries (cavities)
- Sinusitis
- Black hairy tongue
- Smoker's lip (like a burn)
- Altered sense of taste and smell
- Delayed wound healing
- 'Smoker's palate'—red inflammation on the roof of the mouth

Periodontal disease

Smoking has been established as a significant factor for gum disease. Smoking reduces blood flow to the gums, depriving them of oxygen and nutrients that allow gums to stay healthy and allows waste products to build up thereby leaving them vulnerable to bacterial infection. Smokers are about four times more likely to have periodontal disease than non-smokers. If unchecked, periodontal disease can lead to complete destruction of the tooth's supporting tissues, abscesses and, ultimately loss of the tooth.

Oral cancers

Of the many effects to teeth and gums of smoking, oral cancer is of course the most serious. The death rate from oral cancers (which includes cancers of the tongue, mouth, gums, tonsils and pharynx) exceed the death rate from cervical cancer, and road deaths per year in Australia. Heavy smokers are six times more likely to develop oral cancer. Visiting your dentist and dental hygienist regularly is a way to help detect abnormalities and diagnose oral cancer so that it can be treated early.

Health Benefits of Quitting

- After 20 minutes—Blood pressure and pulse rate returns to normal. Temperature of hands and feet increases to normal.
- 8 hours—Carbon monoxide and oxygen level in blood returns to normal.
- 24hrs—Immediate risk of heart attack starts to fall.
- 14 days—Circulation improves. Energy level improves. Lung function increases up to 30%.
- 1 month—Most nicotine withdrawal symptoms disappear.
- 3 months—Cilia regrow in lungs, increase in their ability to handle mucus, clean themselves and reduce infection.
- 1 year—Risk of coronary disease is half that of smoker.
- 10 years—Risk of lung cancer is 30-50% that of continuing smoker.
- 15 years—Stroke risk same as non-smoker. Risk of coronary heart disease same as a non-smoker.

Dental benefits of quitting

- Initial and continuing benefits:
- Improved gingival and oral tissue health.
- Improved taste sensation after 48 hours.
- Prevents bad breath.
- Minimizes tooth staining.
- Smoker's palate disappears shortly after cessation of smoking.

Longer term benefits:

- Reduced risk of periodontal disease and tooth loss.
- Improved treatment outcomes for:
 - Oral surgery
 - Periodontics
 - Implants
 - Prosthesis
 - Restorative and aesthetic dentistry

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- Smokers' melanosis in heavy smokers reverses after a year and gingival colour returns to normal.
 - Oral leukoplakia ('white' lesions) may regress or disappear following cessation.
 - Diminished risk of mouth, throat and oesophagus cancer to half that of a smoker after 5 years.

Getting started at quitting

When you are ready to quit your dental team can assist and support you. There are many resources available to help you. Some tips to get you started at quitting include the following:

Begin by figuring out why and when you smoke as the first step towards quitting for good.

In order to succeed, you must convince yourself that you really want to stop smoking.

There are two ways to quit smoking: going "cold turkey" and tapering off slowly. Whichever way you choose, pick a memorable date to quit, preferably during a time of low stress.

Get plenty of exercise.

If you have been a heavy smoker, the use of nicotine replacement therapy (patches or gum) or medication (Bupropion Hcl, Zyban) may help break the physical addiction. See your GP for prescription and further advice.

Don't be discouraged! On average it takes about five attempts to successfully stop smoking.

Each relapse brings you one step closer to quitting for good.

4 ways to avoid a cigarette even when you're desperate:

- **Ring the Quitline 131848**
- **Remember how far you have come.**
- **Do some light exercise**
- **Remember the 4Ds**

Delay

Deep breathe

Drink water

Do something else