

Tobacco and Oral Health

Almost everybody knows that smoking can cause lung diseases, heart disease, and stroke.

Ever think about what happens to the place where you put the tobacco - your mouth? Stained teeth, brown hairy tongue and bad breath are the least of your problems.



Smoking

- Reduces blood flow to your gums and cuts the supply of vital nutrients
- Reduces vitamin C levels, which is needed to keep your gums healthy
- Can cause gum disease, bone loss and tooth loss
- Reduces your saliva flow. Saliva is needed to clean the lining of your mouth and protect teeth from decay
- Raises the mouth's temperature, damaging and killing important cells in your mouth
- Releases tobacco compounds that cause oral cancer (cancer of the mouth)
- Smokers are 2 to 18 times more likely to develop oral cancer than non-smokers.

Smokeless tobacco (moist snuff, dip or chewing tobacco)

- Eats away at your gums and wears them down
- Increases your risk of tooth decay and gum disease
- Increases the risk of any oral cancer by four to six times

* Smokeless tobacco users are up to 50 times more likely to develop oral cancer in areas where the tobacco is placed.

Early warning signs of oral cancer

- A swelling, lump, or growth in the mouth that does not heal
- White or red patches inside the mouth that don't go away
- Loose teeth for no apparent reason
- Pain when swallowing
- Persistent sore throat
- Difficulty swallowing or in opening your mouth
- A nagging cough or persistent hoarseness
- Unusual bleeding in your nose or mouth
- Numbness or tingling in your lips or tongue

If you have signs or symptoms, see a dentist. Dentists are highly trained specialists in oral diseases. They can detect oral cancers at an early stage when they are small and most treatable.

Best defenses against oral cancer

- Stop using tobacco
- Check yourself for oral cancer once a month if you use tobacco.
- Get an oral cancer examination at your annual dental visit.