



# Smoking, Vaping, and Oral Health

## How Tobacco and Nicotine Products Affect Your Mouth

### Why This Matters

Smoking and the use of nicotine products remain major risk factors for oral disease. In addition to affecting the lungs and heart, tobacco and nicotine can damage the teeth, gums, oral tissues, and bone that support the teeth.

Whether you smoke cigarettes, cigars, use smokeless tobacco, vape, or use nicotine pouches, these products can negatively affect your oral health.

Quitting tobacco or nicotine use is one of the best steps you can take to improve both your oral and overall health.

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## How Smoking Affects the Mouth

Smoking exposes the mouth to thousands of chemicals, many of which can damage oral tissues.

Smoking increases the risk of:

- Gum disease
- Tooth loss
- Oral cancer
- Delayed healing after dental treatment
- Tooth staining
- Bad breath
- Dry mouth
- Dental implant complications

The risk generally increases with long-term tobacco use.

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## Gum Disease

Smoking is one of the strongest risk factors for periodontal (gum) disease.

It can:

- Reduce blood flow to the gums
- Impair the body's immune response
- Slow healing
- Increase bone loss around teeth

Smokers may have more severe gum disease but **less noticeable bleeding**, making the condition harder to recognize in its early stages.

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## Tooth Loss

Untreated gum disease can gradually destroy the bone and tissues supporting the teeth.

As a result, smokers are more likely to lose teeth than people who do not smoke.

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## Oral Cancer

Tobacco use significantly increases the risk of developing oral cancer.

This includes cancers affecting the:

- Lips
- Tongue
- Floor of the mouth
- Cheeks
- Gums
- Throat

The risk is even greater when tobacco use is combined with heavy alcohol consumption.

Regular dental examinations include screening for abnormal oral tissues that may require further evaluation.

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## Tooth Staining and Bad Breath

Smoking commonly causes:

- Yellow or brown tooth stains
- Persistent bad breath
- Increased plaque buildup
- Changes in taste

Professional dental cleanings can reduce some stains, but quitting smoking provides the greatest long-term benefit.

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## Delayed Healing

Smoking slows healing after:

- Tooth extractions
- Gum surgery
- Dental implant placement
- Other oral surgical procedures

Reduced blood flow makes it more difficult for tissues to repair themselves.

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## What About Vaping?

Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) do not burn tobacco like traditional cigarettes, but they are **not risk-free**.

Research on the long-term effects of vaping continues, but current evidence suggests vaping may:

- Increase dry mouth
- Irritate oral tissues
- Promote inflammation of the gums
- Increase bacterial changes associated with gum disease
- Delay healing after some dental procedures

Many vaping products also contain nicotine, which can affect blood flow and healing.

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# Smokeless Tobacco

Products such as chewing tobacco and snuff can increase the risk of:

- Gum recession
- Tooth wear
- Tooth decay
- White patches inside the mouth (leukoplakia)
- Oral cancer

These products are **not** a safe alternative to smoking.

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# Nicotine Pouches

Nicotine pouches do not contain tobacco leaf, but they still deliver nicotine.

Research on their long-term effects is ongoing.

Possible concerns include:

- Gum irritation
- Localized gum recession
- Dry mouth
- Increased nicotine dependence

More research is needed to fully understand their long-term effects on oral health.

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# Benefits of Quitting

Quitting tobacco or nicotine use can improve oral health at any age.

Benefits may include:

- Healthier gums
- Improved healing
- Reduced risk of gum disease
- Lower risk of oral cancer
- Better breath
- Reduced tooth staining

- Improved overall health

Some benefits begin within weeks after quitting, while others continue to increase over time.

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## How Your Dental Team Can Help

Your dentist or physician can provide support by:

- Discussing the health effects of tobacco
- Monitoring for early signs of oral disease
- Recommending evidence-based tobacco cessation resources
- Referring you to smoking cessation programs when appropriate

Quitting often requires multiple attempts, and professional support can improve success.

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## Protecting Your Oral Health

Whether or not you currently use tobacco or nicotine products, you can help protect your mouth by:

- Brushing twice daily with fluoride toothpaste
  - Cleaning between your teeth every day
  - Visiting your dentist regularly
  - Eating a balanced diet
  - Limiting alcohol consumption
  - Seeking support if you want to quit smoking or vaping
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## Key Takeaways

- ✓ Smoking greatly increases the risk of gum disease, tooth loss, and oral cancer.
- ✓ Vaping is not risk-free and may affect oral health.
- ✓ Smokeless tobacco products can also damage the mouth and increase cancer risk.
- ✓ Nicotine may slow healing after dental treatment.

- ✓ Quitting tobacco or nicotine improves both oral and overall health.
  - ✓ Regular dental examinations help detect problems early.
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## References

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