

# Tobacco & Oral Health - More Than Just Bad Breath!

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Tobacco in the form of cigarettes, smokeless (chew) and cigars can have adverse effects on the oral cavity. These include increased risk of bad breath, persistent stains on teeth, diminished sense of taste and smell, decreased ability to fight infection, tooth loss, periodontal (gum) disease and mouth, throat, laryngeal and esophageal cancer. Only half of the people diagnosed with oral cancer survive more than 5 years. Periodontal disease related to tobacco use accounts for about 75% of the disease in adults.

Smokeless tobacco can severely irritate gum tissue and teeth. Sugar is added to enhance flavor, which increases the risk of decay and added grit may wear down tooth enamel. 28 known cancer-causing chemicals are in smokeless tobacco and are known to cause cancer of the mouth, lip, tongue and pancreas. Swallowing toxins in the juices produced is known to cause cancer of the larynx (voice box), esophagus, colon and bladder.

Oral cancer often starts as a tiny unnoticed spot. It can manifest as an irritation or sore that will not heal, bleeds easily and has no clear cause. Other signs and symptoms include pain, tenderness or numbness, a lump or leathery wrinkled bumpy patch and color changes in soft tissue from healthy light pink to gray, red or white patches. And lastly, difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking or moving the jaw or tongue can be early signs. Oral cancer can occur anywhere in the oral cavity, but the most common areas are the sides of the tongue, under the tongue and inside of the cheeks.

Early detection is the most important way to prevent oral cancer! Oral cancer is easier to detect with regular dental checkups. Oral cancer screenings are done at every appointment. Ask Dr. Bond or your Hygienist how to perform an oral cancer screening at home. It is important to know that harmless spots can look similar to harmful spots. Let your dental health care provider know if you notice an unusual spot in your mouth. Ways to differentiate suspicious areas include non-invasive brush tests and/or biopsies that are sent to a lab for analysis. If pre-cancerous cells are found, they can easily be removed before they turn into cancerous cells.

Smoking cessation has immediate and long-term benefits. We are committed to oral and general health at our office and promote the following helpful ways to quit smoking:

- ✓ Set a date and stick to it.
- ✓ Choose a low stress time.
- ✓ Ask family, friends and/or your healthcare provider for support.
- ✓ Anticipate problems and have a realistic plan to deal with challenges.
- ✓ Try nicotine replacement therapies- Medications can double your chances of quitting for good!
- ✓ Remove tobacco products from your home, office and car.
- ✓ Seek tobacco free environments.
- ✓ Exercise- it makes you feel better about yourself!
- ✓ When you crave tobacco, remember the 4 D's:
  - Delay- your craving will pass in 5-10 minutes
  - Drink water- it will help wash the toxins from your body
  - Do something else- distract yourself by being active
  - Deep breathing- deep inhalations and exhalations are relaxing

## References

1. Center for Disease Control web page.
2. American Dental Association web page.
3. National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health, website 2007.
4. American Cancer Society web page.