



Smoking and the health of your mouth, teeth and gums



quit.org.au

Smoking affects your whole body including your mouth, teeth and gums.

If you smoke, you increase your risk of serious gum problems and mouth cancer.

You are more likely to have tooth decay and lose your teeth. There is no safe level of smoking.

The good news is your body starts to recover the day you stop smoking.

Stopping smoking improves the health of your mouth, teeth and gums.

It is very important to visit your oral health professional to keep your mouth healthy and to have regular mouth cancer checks, even if you do not have teeth.

Mouth cancer

Mouth cancer can affect the lips, inside of cheeks, gums and tongue, and top and bottom of the mouth.

→ **Stopping smoking greatly lowers your risk of mouth cancer. In time your risk of mouth cancer will be close to that of someone who has never smoked.**

If found early, mouth cancer is more likely to be successfully treated. Mouth cancers are generally not painful in the early stages.

Visit your oral health professional straight away if you find:

- › **sores or ulcers** in your mouth that do not go away after two weeks
- › **any white or red patches** in your mouth
- › **any lumps and swellings** that do not go away
- › **any changes** in the way teeth or dentures fit together.

Gum disease (Periodontal disease)

Gum disease is caused by bacteria (plaque) that build up on teeth and along the gums. This bacteria damages the gums and can also damage the bone which holds the teeth in place. Serious gum disease can lead to tooth loss.

If you smoke, you are more likely to develop severe gum disease and lose teeth because:

- › smoking makes it harder for your body to fight gum infections caused by bacteria
- › when you smoke, gums and bone don't heal as well and gum treatments don't work as well.

➔ **Stopping smoking lowers your risk of tooth loss.**

Avoid brushing harder or using smokers' toothpaste to remove stains, as this can damage the surface of your teeth or dentures. And if you use gum or mints to freshen your breath, make sure they are sugar-free.



"I was really surprised when my dentist said I had gum disease, as I'm really careful about cleaning my teeth. She said smoking made it harder for my gums to fight infection. I didn't realise how much damage had already been done. I'd been thinking about quitting for a while and decided I had to do something before it got worse. It's been hard, but my dentist can already see the improvement. Plus, food tastes so much better and I can enjoy eating out more with the money I used to spend on smokes."

→ **Stopping smoking, keeping your teeth clean and regular hygiene visits with your oral health professional **help prevent gum disease** from getting worse.**

When you stop smoking...

- › Your **smile will stay whiter for longer**, as you won't have to worry about new tobacco stains.
- › You may **help prevent dry mouth** developing or getting worse. Having better saliva flow helps protect against tooth decay and helps get better suction under dentures.
- › Your **breath may improve**.
- › Your risk of infection reduces and your **mouth will heal better** after having dental surgery.
- › Your **sense of taste may improve**. The longer you smoke, the more it damages your taste buds, dulling your sense of taste.



"My oral health professional noticed a white patch inside my mouth. He said my smoking raised my chances of getting oral cancer. I've smoked since I left school. Luckily in my case it turned out to be nothing serious, but it was enough of a scare for me to get the help I needed to stop smoking. My mouth feels better and I love that my grandkids, who never liked my cigarette smell, hug me much more now."

For advice or practical help

Your oral health professional, general practitioner (GP) and pharmacist are trained to support you. Your GP or pharmacist can help you decide if you want to use stop smoking medication to help manage your cravings. Some of these medications are cheaper with a script from your doctor.



Quitline counsellors can help build your motivation and skills to help you break free from smoking or vaping. Quitline is free and confidential. You can also ask your oral health professional or doctor for a referral for Quitline to call you.

To contact Quitline:

- › Call **13 7848**
- › Ask Quitline to **call you back** for **free** at **quit.org.au/callback**



There are more ways to contact Quitline including **webchat**, **WhatsApp** and **Messenger**. Scan the QR code or visit **quit.org.au/quitline**



Please note this information is for general use only. Please consult your health professional for further advice.

A partnership between:

