From the office of:
Peter J. Gaidis, DMD
989 N Main St
Williamstown, NJ 08094-1011
(856) 629-7806

ACADEMY of GENERAL DENTISTRY | TOBACCO

UNDERSTANDING THE DANGERS OF TOBACCO USE

Smoking is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States. Smoking cigarettes or using other tobacco products is harmful to your mouth, including your teeth and gums, and can be deadly.



How does smoking impact my oral health?

Each year, about 443,000 people die prematurely due to smoking or exposure to secondhand smoke, and 8.6 million people live with a serious illness caused by smoking. Smoking can impact your overall oral health in a number of ways:

- Reducing blood flow and the supply of vital nutrients to your gums, including vitamin C, which can lead to gum disease, bone loss and tooth loss
- Decreasing the amount of saliva that flows through your mouth
- Affecting the appearance of your teeth, making them discolored with the yellow and brown stains that nicotine and tar leave behind
- Causing inflammation of the roof of your mouth
- Giving you bad breath
- Causing you to lose your sense of taste

Most importantly, smoking causes oral cancer, which is the sixth most common cancer, accounting for nearly 5 percent of all cases. More than 43,000 Americans and 4,000 Canadians were expected to be diagnosed with oral or pharyngeal cancer in 2016, resulting in more than 8,000 deaths (or about one per hour). If oropharyngeal (throat) cancer is included, the number of expected deaths increases to more than 15,000 per year.

Are cigars safe to smoke?

Cigar smoking is not safe because they contain the same toxic and carcinogenic compounds that cigarettes do. Cigar smoking increases your risk for oral cancer, lung cancer, and larynx and esophageal cancers.

Are smokeless tobacco and e-cigarettes safe?

No. The use of smokeless tobacco (including chew, snuff or "dip" and snus, all of which contain nicotine and are addictive) increases your risk for developing gum disease. Smokeless tobacco use also can lead to gum recession, the pulling away of the gum tissue from the teeth. Smokeless tobacco users also are four to six times more likely to develop oral cancer. In fact, the area of your mouth where you place smokeless tobacco is 50 times more likely to be a site of oral cancer.

The use of battery-operated electronic nicotine-delivery systems, such as electronic cigarettes, also is not recommended. E-cigarettes have grown in popularity over the past decade, and there currently isn't much research available about how they may affect your health. However, experts say the nicotine inhalation that occurs while using an e-cigarette can make you susceptible to bacteria buildup in your mouth, as well as tooth decay and dry mouth.

What should I do if I want to quit smoking?

The nicotine found in tobacco products is highly addictive, so quitting can be difficult. But there are ways to successfully stop using tobacco. These include nicotine replacement therapies, such as nasal spray and inhalers, patches, and gum and lozenges, all of which are available to buy over-the-counter. A variety of prescription medications are available as well. For some, smoking-cessation support groups are a helpful resource in the quitting process. These programs are available in both in-person and online community formats.

If you're a smoker, it's never too late to quit. Research has shown that quitting at any age will improve your health and increase your life expectancy. Talk with your dentist for more information.

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