

Smoking and Oral Health

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There was a time, not long ago, when smoking was trendy. Televisions, billboards and magazines were covered in advertisements glorifying smoking. Most of us are aware that smoking is bad for our health. It can cause many different medical problems and, in some cases, fatal diseases. However, many people don't realize the damage that smoking does to their mouth, gums and teeth. Smoking can lead to tooth staining, gum disease, tooth loss. Adults and children can have health problems from breathing secondhand smoke. Smoking can damage a woman's reproductive health and hurt babies. Tobacco use is linked with reduced fertility and a higher risk of miscarriage, early delivery, and stillbirth. Most people know that smoking can cause lung and throat cancer, but many people still don't know that it is one of the main causes of mouth cancer too. The main way that smoking causes cancer is by damaging our DNA, including key genes that protect us against cancer. Many of the chemicals found in cigarettes have been shown to cause DNA damage, including benzene, polonium-210, benzo(a)pyrene and nitrosamines. It's made worse by other chemicals in cigarettes. For example chromium makes poisons like benzo(a)pyrene stick more strongly to DNA, increasing the chances of serious damage. Chemicals like arsenic and nickel interfere with pathways for repairing damaged DNA. This makes it even more likely that damaged cells will eventually turn cancerous. Smokers are less able to handle toxic chemicals than those with healthy lungs and blood. We all have special cleaner proteins called 'detoxification enzymes' that mop up harmful chemicals and convert them into harmless ones. But the chemicals in smoke, such as cadmium, can overwhelm these cleaners. Cigarette smoke also impacts the immune system – increasing cells which can encourage tumor growth in the lungs and suppressing the ones which kill cancer cells. The 10th anniversary of the WHO FCTC shows how coordinated and multisectoral national and international action in the area of tobacco control can de-normalize a risk-factor and move the health agenda forward. But the war on tobacco is not over yet. We still expect 8 million people to be dying each year by 2030 – because they have smoked tobacco or have been exposed to second hand smoke. The use of alternative products such as water pipes, smokeless tobacco and electronic nicotine delivery systems are gaining in popularity and will need to be addressed through tobacco control measures. Staining can often be removed from teeth by dental surgeon or dental hygienist. They can scale and polish teeth and also use a bicarbonate of soda jet. Special toothpastes for people who smoke. They are sometimes a little more abrasive than ordinary toothpastes and you should use them with care. Fresh-breath products such as mouthwashes may help to disguise the problem in the short term, but will not cure it.

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