

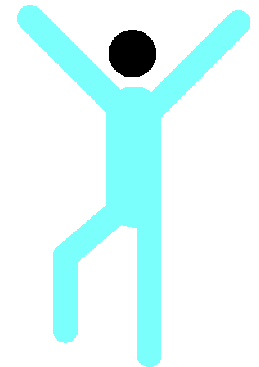
Smoking and Oral Health

How smoking affects the mouth

Many people do not realise that smoking and chewing tobacco products can cause or worsen many conditions of the mouth. The most serious condition affecting the mouth is oral cancer.

Oral cancer is the name given to cancer that affects the:

- Lip
- Tongue
- Gingival
- All of the oral mucosa, eg. cheek, palate etc
- Oropharynx
- Oral part of the pharynx Uvula to the level of the hyoid bone



The following will increase the risk of developing oral cancer:

- Tobacco use alone accounts for more than 90% of oral cancers
- Secondhand smoke may increase oral cancer
- Smokeless tobacco e.g. chewing tobacco, eg. snuff, gutkha etc
- Betel quid, with or without added tobacco
- Alcohol, especially when combined with smoking
- A poor diet especially when deficient in vitamins including A, C and E

Oral leukoplakia is commonly seen in the mouths of smokers and develops at the site in the mouth where the tobacco product is held.:

- Leukoplakia presents as thickened areas/patches in the mouth, white in colour
- The patches may become malignant but usually cancer develops in the areas next to or around the Leukoplakia
- Usually it is non-symptomatic so patients are not aware they have it
- Because Leukoplakia or the surrounding areas may become malignant it is always taken very seriously

Turn over....

Smoking and Oral Health (continued)

Periodontal disease is the collective term given to inflammatory disorders that affect the periodontium (tissue that surround and support the teeth), eg. gingivitis (gums), periodontitis (all structures and bone supporting the teeth). Smokers are at increased risk of suffering from periodontal disease because:

- Smokers have decreased levels of saliva and serum immunoglobulins (antibody), so their ability to fight bacteria is reduced.
- Smoking alters cells that attack bacteria and this affects smoker's ability to clear pathogens (germs). This may increase the severity of periodontal disease suffered.
- Smoking causes reduced blood flow to the gums
- Gums and supporting tissues of the tooth more likely to become inflamed
- Gum disease will get worse more quickly
- May not get warning signs that a non smoker would get, eg. bleeding gums
- Outcome of treatment not as good as that of a non smoker

Wound healing is also impaired if someone smokes, this is because:

- Smokers have decreased levels of saliva and serum immunoglobulins (antibody), so their ability to clear away pathogens (germs) is reduced
- Smokers have decreased blood oxygenation so they have decreased oxygen levels delivered to tissues which will prevent/hinder the healing process
- Smokers suffer from a dry socket (loss of blood clot) 4 times more often than a non smoker.

Other effects of smoking:

- Discoloration of teeth, denture and restoration
- Halitosis (bad breath)
- Oral Candidosis (e.g. thrush)
- Smoking melanosis
- Areas of melanin pigmentation (color of soft tissue changes)
- This is not pre-malignant and disappears when stop smoking
- Smokers palate
- The palate turns white it can have red dots (raised lumps). This is not pre-malignant and disappears when smoking is stopped

