

Tobacco and Gum Disease

As you probably already know, tobacco use is linked with many serious illnesses such as cancer, lung disease and heart disease, as well as numerous other health problems. What you may not know is tobacco users are at increased risk for periodontal disease. In fact, recent studies have shown that tobacco use may be one of the most significant risk factors in the development and progression of periodontal disease.

Whether you smoke, dip or chew tobacco, you are more likely to have periodontal disease- and to have it more severely- than those who do not use any form of tobacco.

As a smoker, you are more likely than non-smokers to have calculus form on your teeth, have deeper pockets between your teeth and gums, and lose more of the bone and tissue that support your teeth. If left untreated, periodontal disease will progress. The pockets between your teeth and gums can grow deeper, allowing in more bacteria that destroy tissue and supporting bone. Research shows that smokers lose more teeth than non-smokers.

As a user of smokeless tobacco, your gums are more likely to recede, and you have a greater chance of losing the bone and fibers that hold your teeth in your mouth. If your gums recede to the point where the tooth roots are exposed, your teeth may become susceptible to root cavities or sensitive to cold and touch (not to mention the fact that your chances of developing oral cancer increase with smokeless tobacco use).

These problems, associated with tobacco use of any kind, are caused by the many chemicals, such as nicotine and tar, in tobacco. These chemicals have harmful effects on the periodontal tissues. They cause an increase in the accumulation of plaque and calculus (or tartar) that can irritate your gums and lead to infection. Following periodontal treatment or any type of oral surgery, the chemicals in tobacco can also slow down the healing process and make the treatment results less predictable.

Tobacco use is addictive, yet every year millions of Americans quit. The benefits include reduced chances of developing cancer, lung disease and heart disease, as well as less expensive health care. When you quit using tobacco, you also reduce your chances of getting oral and gum diseases. Gums that are free of disease are essential to help you keep your teeth for a lifetime.

Quitting takes commitment- and it's usually easier if you have help. To begin a tobacco-cessation program, talk to your periodontist or physician. They are prepared to help you.

Oregon Quit Line number: 1-877-270-7867

The American Academy of Periodontology