

Quitting smoking improves the health of your mouth, gums and teeth and reduces your risk of oral cancers and other diseases caused by smoking.

How to quit

To improve your chance of quitting smoking for good, it is a good idea to plan ahead. You may find these tips useful:

- **Get support:** Call Quitline 13 QUIT (13 7848) for free information, practical assistance and support. Quitline's trained counsellors are available seven days a week to help you get through the process of quitting.
- **Talk to your health professional:** Discuss quitting smoking with a general practitioner, pharmacist or community health worker, and plan your quitting strategy together.
- **Consider using pharmacotherapy:** Different products are available to help you quit smoking. Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) includes patches, gum, lozenges, sublingual tablets and inhalers. The aim of NRT products is to replace some of the nicotine from cigarettes without the harmful chemicals found in tobacco smoke, thus reducing withdrawal symptoms such as cravings and anxiety. Bupropion Hcl and Varenicline are non-nicotine medications, that are also effective in helping smokers to quit.
- **When the urge to smoke strikes, remember the '4Ds':**
 - Delay:** Delay for at least five minutes and the urge will pass.
 - Deep breathe:** Breathe slowly and deeply.
 - Drink water:** Take 'time out' and sip water slowly.
 - Do something else:** Ring a friend or go for a walk.



Further information:

www.quitnow.info.au • www.cancerqld.org.au
www.health.qld.gov.au/quitsmoking
Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20

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Smoking and the health of your mouth, gums and teeth



What effect does smoking have on my mouth?

Smoking is a major cause of oral cancer. Oral cancer includes tumours of the cheek, gum, tongue, lip and the floor and lining of the mouth.

Signs of oral cancer may be white or red patches in the mouth that do not go away, sores in the mouth that do not heal, changes in the way teeth fit together or lumps and swelling.

Men who smoke are 10 times more likely to get oral cancer compared to men who do not smoke. The chance of developing oral cancer is five times higher in women who smoke compared to women who do not smoke. Only half of the people who get oral cancer will survive after five years.

Heavy alcohol use is also a major risk factor for oral cancer. Tobacco and alcohol account for most cases of oral cancers, and the combination of smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol places you at even greater chance of developing oral cancer.

What if I quit smoking?

If you quit smoking now, in five years your chance of developing oral cancer is halved and continues to reduce over time.

After 10 years, the risk of oral cancer is similar to someone who has never smoked.

If you quit smoking and limit your alcohol intake, your chance of developing oral cancer reduces dramatically.

What does smoking do to my gums and teeth?

If you smoke, you are around three times more likely to have periodontal disease (gum disease). This is because smoking reduces your immune system's ability to control the harmful bacteria that cause periodontal disease.

Periodontal disease causes the gums to become inflamed, infected and break down. As the gums break down, deep spaces are formed between the tooth and the gum. Known as periodontal pockets, these spaces mean there is less support to hold the tooth in place and more chance of losing your tooth. Bleeding gums are usually a sign of periodontal pockets, but the nicotine in tobacco smoke decreases blood flow to the gums. This means that the symptoms of periodontal disease may be masked.

People who smoke are also more likely to have tooth decay and tooth loss than people who do not smoke. This is because the root surfaces of the teeth become exposed by periodontal pockets and are more susceptible to infection.

Quitting smoking, good oral hygiene and having regular check-ups with your dentist will help prevent and control periodontal disease.

Does smoking cause other changes in my mouth?

- Smoking causes staining of the teeth and bad breath. **Quitting will help to prevent further staining and can improve the smell of your breath.**
- Smoking can dull your taste buds and make food taste bland. **Quitting lets you taste food again.**
- Smokers have reduced blood flow to their gums. If you smoke it takes longer to heal after an injury or surgery to your mouth. **Quitting means a better recovery and a shorter healing time.**
- Smokers can also get 'smoker's melanosis'. The gums change colour and become red or develop brown spots. **Quitting can reverse this.**
- Smoking can cause 'smoker's palate'. Smokers develop a pale or white roof of the mouth often with red dots. **Smoker's palate can disappear when you quit smoking.**
- Smoking inhibits the ability of saliva to break down bacteria and food products in the mouth. **Quitting allows saliva to recover and continue protecting the mouth.**