

Kicking the habit

Keeping your smile healthy

If you use tobacco, you are probably familiar with the reasons why you should stop. Here are a few more to help you quit once and for all.

Although the damage you may be doing to your lungs cannot readily be seen, the damage to your smile is much more evident. Tobacco often causes unsightly stains on tooth enamel, but it's also responsible for diseases of the mouth. Smoking may be responsible for more than half of periodontal (gum) diseases among adults. Smokers have a much greater risk of developing oral cancer than do nonsmokers. And heavy smoking and drinking together puts you at even greater risk of developing oral cancer.

TOBACCO THREATS

Consider these tobacco threats to your oral health and overall health:

- oral cancer;
- periodontal (gum) disease—a leading cause of tooth loss and of sensitivity to hot and cold;
- bad breath;
- stained teeth and tongue;
- diminished sense of taste and smell;
- delayed healing after a tooth extraction or other oral surgery;
- difficulties in correcting cosmetic dental problems;
- buildup of tartar on the teeth;
- fewer options for some kinds of dental care (smokers can be poor candidates for particular treatments, such as implants).

Why take chances? Join the millions of Americans who have successfully quit once and for all. It's not easy, but it is important. You can quit too.

A DOZEN WAYS TO KICK THE HABIT

1. Develop a list of your own personal reasons for quitting.
2. Set a date to quit in the near future and stick to it.

3. Join a tobacco-use cessation program for support.

4. Enlist the support of your dentist, physician, family, friends and co-workers.

5. Exercise. It may make you feel better about yourself and your decision to quit smoking.

6. Keep your mouth occupied. Sugarless gum may fend off an urge to smoke.

7. Choose a low-stress time to quit, perhaps during a vacation.

8. Don't carry matches or tobacco.

9. Quit the smoking habit all at once—cold turkey.

10. Try all available resources, including audiotapes and videotapes, books, pamphlets, tip sheets and other self-help materials to successfully quit smoking.

11. Ask your dentist or physician about prescribing a pharmaceutical aid—approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration—for use in smoking cessation programs.

12. Don't let setbacks discourage you. Keep trying. And don't be lured back. Tobacco industry advertising and promotions encourage former users to relapse. Don't buy a pack of cigarettes because you slipped up and smoked one or two.

Remind yourself of the great benefits of quitting:

- You'll reduce the risk of oral, lung and other cancers.
- You'll taste and enjoy food again.
- You'll feel more relaxed without nicotine.
- You won't be plagued by "smoker's breath."
- Your family and friends will thank you. You can do it.

For more information, talk to your dentist for advice on preventing oral cancer. Also, call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit the Web site at "www.cancer.org". <

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