

Quit Smoking to Improve Oral Health

(NC) As prevention professionals, dental hygienists are concerned about the effects of smoking on both oral and overall health. While the effects of smoking on your lungs, heart and other organs are not visible to the naked eye, your dental hygienist can easily see the evidence in your mouth.

Smokers can expect to develop some combination of the following, depending on the amount and length of time they have smoked: persistent bad breath, discoloured teeth, an increase in tartar build-up, jaw bone loss, shifting teeth, an increased number of missing teeth, mouth sores, cavities, sinusitis, hairy tongue, smoker's lip, altered sense of taste and smell, and delayed wound healing.



Smoking has been established as a significant risk factor for gum disease. Tobacco reduces blood flow to the gums, depriving them of oxygen and nutrients that allow gums to stay healthy, and leaving them vulnerable to bacterial infection.

Of the many negative effects smoking can have on your dental health, oral cancer is the most serious. The death rate from oral cancers — which includes cancers of the tongue, mouth, gums, tonsils and pharynx — exceeds the death rate from cervical cancer.

Men and women of all ages experience major and immediate health benefits when they quit

smoking. Ex-smokers have a decreased risk of heart disease, respiratory illnesses, strokes and many cancers. In fact, after 15 years an ex-smoker's risk of death is similar to that of a person who has never smoked.

Quitting will have a significant positive impact on oral health as well, reducing the rate and incidence of gum disease, oral cancers and bone and tooth loss; keeping teeth whiter; and allowing sores to heal and disappear. And you will be reducing the risk of passing on harmful second-hand smoke to your loved ones.

When you're ready to quit, your oral health professional is ready to support and assist you. There are many resources available through your oral health team to help you make this important transition. Your dental hygienist can provide more detailed self-help about smoking cessation.

Find more information at www.cdho.org.



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