

Tobacco and Oral Health

Tobacco use is the leading cause of oral cancer. Oral cancer is cancer of the mouth—the lip, tongue, cheeks, gums, floor or roof of the mouth.

You can get oral cancer from:

Smoking—cigarettes, cigars, and pipes. Cigarette smokers are 6 times more likely to get oral cancer than people who have never smoked.

Smokeless tobacco—chewing tobacco, snuff, and dip tobacco. Smokeless tobacco users are about 50 times more likely to get cancer of the cheek, gums, and inner surface of the lips than people who do not use it.

Using tobacco in any form:

- Increases your risk of gum disease and tooth loss.
- Causes mouth sores that will not heal.
- Slows healing after gum surgery.
- Stains your teeth, fillings, and tongue.
- Dulls your sense of taste and smell.
- Causes bad breath.

Smokeless Tobacco

Smokeless tobacco contains nicotine, sweeteners, abrasives, salts, and over 3000 other chemicals. More than 28 of these chemicals cause cancer.

People who use smokeless tobacco absorb 3 to 4 times more nicotine than cigarette smokers. The nicotine is absorbed into the bloodstream through the tissues of the mouth. Using eight to 10 dips or chews provides you with the same amount of nicotine as smoking 30 to 40 cigarettes.

The chemicals in smokeless tobacco can cause mouth sores and cracked and bleeding lips and gums. Long-term use of smokeless tobacco can lead to cancer of the tongue, throat, gums, and the floor or roof of the mouth.

The abrasives in smokeless tobacco wear away the surface of the tooth. The sugar it contains increases a user's risk of developing tooth decay.

Symptoms of Oral Cancer

See your dentist or family doctor immediately if you notice any of these symptoms:

- a lump or a leathery, wrinkled, or bumpy patch inside your mouth
- white, red, or grey spots or patches in your mouth that may or may not be painful
- pain, tenderness, or numbness in your mouth or lips
- a sore or irritation on your lip or inside your mouth that does not heal
- difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking, or moving your jaw or tongue
- a change in the way your teeth fit together
- loose teeth
- difficulty wearing dentures
- a lump in your throat
- an earache

For information and support to help you to quit smoking or using smokeless tobacco products contact Public Health Services or Addiction Services in your area or call:

Tobacco Free Nova Scotia
811

Keep your smile healthy... be tobacco free!