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Smoking and Oral Health

How can smoking affect the health of my mouth?

Most people know that smoking is bad for their health. It can cause many different health problems and, in some cases, fatal diseases. However, many people don't realise the damage that smoking does to their mouth, gums and teeth. Smoking can lead to tooth staining, gum disease, tooth loss and – more seriously – mouth cancer.

Why are my teeth stained?

One of the effects of smoking is staining on the teeth due to the nicotine and tar in tobacco. It can make the teeth yellow in a very short time, and heavy smokers often complain that their teeth are almost brown after years of smoking.

How will smoking affect my gums and teeth?

People who smoke are more likely to have gum disease. Smoking may change the type of bacteria in dental plaque, increasing the number of bacteria that are more harmful. It also reduces the blood flow in the gums and supporting tissues of the tooth and makes them more likely to become inflamed. Smokers' gum disease will get worse more quickly than in people who do not smoke. Because of the reduced blood flow smokers may not get the warning symptoms of bleeding gums as much as non-smokers. Gum disease is still the most common cause of tooth loss in adults.

How is smoking linked with cancer?

Most people know that smoking can cause lung and throat cancer, but many people still don't realise that it is one of the main causes of mouth cancer too. There are more and more new cases of mouth cancer each year, and thousands die every year from the disease.

Are there special dental products I can use?

There are toothpastes designed for people who smoke. However, they are normally more abrasive than normal toothpastes and so you should use them with care. There are several whitening toothpastes on the market. Although they do not affect the natural colour of your teeth, they can sometimes help at removing staining. However whitening toothpastes also tend to be fairly abrasive.

Mouthwashes may help to disguise the problem in the short term, but that is all that they will do.

What can my dentist do for me? Your dentist will carry out a thorough examination to make sure that your teeth, gums and whole mouth are healthy. Your dentist will also examine your cheeks, tongue and throat for signs of any other conditions that may need more investigation.

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They will also be able to put you in touch with organisations and self-help groups who will have the latest information to help you stop smoking.

Will I need any extra treatment?

Your dentist may refer you to a dental hygienist for further treatment, thorough cleaning and to keep a closer check on your oral hygiene.

If you would like help to quit you can contact:

Smoke free

Helpline: 0800 988 8872 or text RED to 82010

Fax Number: 020 8926 5004

Public Email: stopsmoking@redbridge-pct.nhs.uk

Website: www.redquit.co.uk or www.nhs.uk/smokefree