



TOBACCO USE AND ORAL HEALTH

Of the 46 million U.S. adult smokers, 50 percent see a dentist each year. Even if only a small percentage of them were influenced to quit through dentist counseling, the positive effects would be enormous.

How the dental profession may help people to stop smoking

Of the 46 million U.S. adult smokers, 50 percent see a dentist each year. Even if only a small percentage of them were influenced to quit through dentist counseling, the positive effects would be enormous.

To that end, a study will examine how dentists can utilize tobacco-use intervention techniques to educate dental patients in overcoming their tobacco addiction. Delta Dental is assisting in the five-year study.

The project, a collaboration between Delta Dental and the University of California, San Francisco School of Dentistry, involves recruited dentists in California, Pennsylvania and West Virginia who received different levels of training in tobacco cessation counseling. In 2006, these dentists' patients are being surveyed to identify the benefits of the training and to compare the results with those of patients who visited dentists who received either less intensive training or no training at all.

How does tobacco use affect your oral health?

While most people are aware of the impact tobacco use has on their overall health, some might not consider its effects on oral health, including:

- 50 percent of smoking adults have gum (periodontal) disease. Smokers are about twice as likely to lose their teeth as non-smokers.
- Cigarette smokers are twice as likely to need root canal treatment.
- Smoking leads to reduced effectiveness of treatment for gum disease.
- Smoking increases risk of mouth pain, cavities and gum recession (which can lead to tooth loss).
- Tobacco reduces the body's ability to fight infection, including in the mouth and gums.
- Smoking also limits the growth of blood vessels, slowing the healing of gum tissue after oral surgery or from injury.
- Smokeless tobacco (snuff or chewing tobacco) is associated with cancers of the cheek, gums and lining of the lips. Users of smokeless tobacco are 50 times more likely to develop these cancers than non-users.
- Cigars, chewing tobacco, snuff and unprocessed tobacco leaves (used as cigar wrappers) contain tiny particles that are abrasive to teeth. When mixed with saliva and chewed, an abrasive paste is created that wears down teeth over time.

Tobacco use and children

All parents, even those who do not use tobacco, should educate themselves and their children about the dangers of smoking:

- 3,000 children and teens become regular users each day (including chewing tobacco).
- Nearly one-quarter of all high school students smoke.
- Some tobacco companies target children with cherry-flavored chewing tobacco sold in colorful containers and sweet-smelling candy-flavored cigarettes packaged in shiny tins.
- Children exposed to tobacco smoke may have delays in the formation of their permanent teeth.
- Women who smoke may be more likely to have children born with an oral cleft (cleft lip or cleft palate).

What you can do

If you are a smoker or a parent with a child or teen who you suspect may be using tobacco, you can start by understanding that tobacco dependence is a nicotine addiction disorder.

There are four aspects to nicotine addiction: physical, sensory, psychological and behavioral. All aspects of nicotine addiction need to be addressed in order to break the habit. This difficulty can mean that tobacco users may need to try several times before they are able to successfully kick the habit.

Close