



Figure 4: Stained teeth with tartar build-up in smoker's mouth

Photo courtesy of Dr R Hirsch University of Adelaide

All toothpastes get their cleaning power from tiny abrasive particles that remove stains and plaque and gently polish teeth. Smokers' toothpastes often have more of these particles, and should be used with care. Vigorous brushing may result in excessive wear, removing the protective enamel and causing abrasion of exposed root surfaces. A dental professional can give advice on how to care for your teeth.

Smoking affects the mouth in many ways

- > **Smokers' breath**
- > **Stained teeth**
- > **Loss of taste**
- > **Gum disease**
- > **Tooth loss**
- > **Oral cancers**

The risk of these problems reduces as soon as you QUIT

Quitting smoking

- > Ask health professionals such as your doctor, dentist or pharmacist for advice.

> **Phone QUITLINE**

Australia: 137 848 (13 QUIT)

New Zealand: 0800 778 778

- > Set yourself achievable goals and do not be discouraged by short-term failures.

Acknowledgement:

Colgate Oral Care

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Smoking and Your Mouth

Special Topic Pamphlet No. 1

Tobacco smoking causes more ill health and premature death than any other drug use in Australia and New Zealand. Smoking affects the whole body including the mouth.

About 13% of the Australian population and 18% of the New Zealand adults are current smokers. Most start the habit in their teens.

Cigarette smoking is a major cause of many health problems including:

- > lung and heart diseases
- > strokes
- > poor pregnancy outcomes
- > oral diseases including oral cancers and gum disease leading to tooth loss.

How smoking affects the mouth

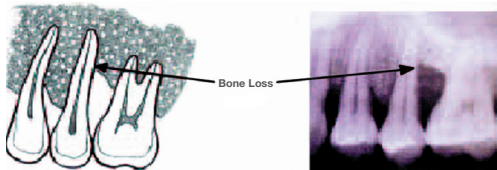
Smoking causes smokers' breath, stained teeth, loss of taste and changes to the gums.

Healthy gums are pink and firm. Smokers' gums are often thickened and may vary in colour from unusually pale to purplish in severe cases. These changes are due to the effect smoking has in restricting the supply of blood and oxygen to the gums.



Figure 1: Healthy gums

Figure 2: Loss of bone shown in X-ray of patient with gum disease



Smoking and Gum Disease

According to the Australian National Survey of Adult Oral Health 2004-06 and the New Zealand Oral Health Survey 2009, respectively 23% of Australian adults and 33.5% of New Zealand adults suffer from gum disease (periodontal disease).

Healthy gums need good circulation to bring oxygen and nutrients in and take waste products [carbon dioxide] away. Good circulation is also an important defence against infection. Smoking disrupts this process and smokers are up to 6 times more likely to develop gum disease than non-smokers.

Gum disease— you can't see it, you may not feel it, but you do need to worry about it!

Smoking causes damage to the gums and the bone supporting the teeth. Long-term gum disease can result in tooth loss – smokers lose more teeth than non-smokers.

However, progress of the disease can be stopped and further damage prevented by stopping smoking, combined with appropriate dental care.

Figure 3: Oral cancer on the side of the tongue



Smoking and oral cancer

Smoking is a major cause of cancer in the mouth. The more cigarettes per year you smoke and the more years you have been smoking, the greater the risk.

Oral cancers make up 3% and 1% of all cancers in Australia and New Zealand, respectively. They occur more often in people who have smoked for many years, or who smoke and are heavy drinkers.

Oral cancers diagnosed in the early stages may often be successfully treated. Early-stage cancers usually are not painful eg a small white or red area or an ulceration that does not heal. These can be detected during dental check-ups.

Regular dental check-ups are important because by the time the symptoms of oral cancer become noticeable to the patient, the cancer may be in its late stages and the prognosis is less favourable.

Quitting smoking reduces the risk of oral cancer and gum disease.

Common problems in the mouth caused by smoking

Problems after dental treatment

Smoking often causes:

- > complications after tooth extraction.
- > slower healing after gum disease treatment.
- > failure of dental implants.

Quitting smoking reduces the likelihood of problems.

Stained teeth and smokers' breath

Smoking stains your teeth and fillings. Smokers' breath may be made worse by the build-up of calculus [tartar]. Mints to freshen the breath may contain sugar and lead to decay problems. Always use a soft-bristled brush to clean your teeth, and see a dental professional for cleaning and polishing to remove stains and calculus from your teeth.