

Tobacco and Oral Health

Oral cancer is cancer of the mouth, including the lips, tongue, cheeks, gums, and floor or roof of the mouth. Oral cancer may be caused by things like alcohol use or a human papillomavirus (HPV) infection, but the most common cause of oral cancer is tobacco use.

- You can get oral cancer from smoking tobacco in cigarettes, cigars, or pipes. Cigarette smokers are 6 times more likely to get oral cancer than people who have never smoked.
- Smokeless tobacco, including chewing tobacco, snuff, and dip tobacco, also causes oral cancer.
- Smokeless tobacco users are 50 times more likely to get cancer of the cheeks, gums, and the inside of the lips than people who do not use it.

Using tobacco in any form:

- › Raises your risk of gum disease and tooth loss
- › Causes mouth sores that will not heal
- › Slows healing after 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 (grinding materials), salts, and more than 3,000 other chemicals. Many of these chemicals cause cancer.
- People who use smokeless tobacco take in 3 to 4 times more nicotine than cigarette smokers. Nicotine from smokeless tobacco enters the bloodstream through the tissues of the mouth. Using 8 to 10 chews or dips gives you the same amount of nicotine as smoking 30 to 40 cigarettes.
- The chemicals in smokeless tobacco cause mouth sores, and cracks and bleeding in the lips and gums. Long-term use of smokeless tobacco can lead to cancer of the tongue, throat, gums, and floor or roof of the mouth.
- The abrasives in smokeless tobacco wear away the surface of the teeth. The sugar in smokeless tobacco raises your risk of tooth decay.

Symptoms of oral cancer

See your dentist or primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) right away if you have 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 an irritation on your lip or inside your mouth that does not heal
- › Trouble chewing, swallowing, talking, or moving your jaw or tongue
- › A change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite down
- › Loose teeth
- › Trouble wearing dentures
- › A lump in your throat
- › An earache

For information and support to help you quit smoking or using smokeless tobacco products, contact:

- Nova Scotia Public Health
 - › Phone (toll-free): 1-800-670-4357
- Nova Scotia Mental Health and Addictions
 - › Phone (toll-free): 1-855-922-1122
- 811 to talk to a Registered Nurse
- Tobacco Free Nova Scotia
 - › <https://tobaccofree.novascotia.ca>

Keep your smile healthy. Be tobacco free!

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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