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Although rates of smoking have declined steadily since the 1970s, research shows that 24% of the UK adult population smoke which is approximately 12.5 million people.

Smoking can lead to many different health issues and diseases and, in some instances, these can be fatal. Although most people are aware of the effect that smoking can have on their body and general health, many are unaware of the effects that smoking has on their mouths which include:

- stained teeth
- bad breath (halitosis)
- tooth loss
- gum disease
- loss of taste and smell
- reduced blood supply to the mouth
- increased build-up of plaque and tartar on your teeth
- delayed healing following dental extractions and other oral surgery
- increased risk of oral cancer

How often should I visit my dentist?

It is very important that you take your dentist's advice and visit them as often as they recommend. As well as checking your teeth, the dentist will check your cheeks, tongue and soft tissues. Any changes in the mouth can be picked up early by visiting your dentist regularly.

How will smoking affect my gums and teeth?

Smoking tobacco causes a lack of oxygen in your bloodstream, leading to the infected gums not being able to heal. Smoking causes gum disease to progress faster than in non-smokers. Gum disease is the most common cause of tooth loss in adults.

Why are my teeth stained?

One of the effects of smoking is staining of your teeth. This is caused by the tar and nicotine in the cigarettes. Smoking can make your teeth yellow in a short period of time and people who have smoked for many years often complain that their teeth are brown in colour and this is due to the staining from tobacco.

What is the risk of developing oral cancer?

Approximately 90% of people with cancer of the mouth, tongue, lips, and throat use or have used tobacco. The risk of developing these cancers significantly increase with the amount of tobacco smoked. People that smoke are six times more likely than non-smokers to develop these cancers.

If you notice an ulcer that is not healing or anything suspicious in your mouth then you should contact your dentist or GP.

What are the benefits of giving up smoking?

- your breath will smell fresher
- you won't get any further cigarette related staining of your teeth
- the health of your body and mouth should start to greatly improve
- your sense of smell and taste will greatly improve
- your breathing should become easier
- it reduces the risk of fatal diseases
- it reduces the risk for others, caused by second hand (passive) smoking
- you will make financial savings

How can I quit smoking?

The nicotine in cigarettes is an extremely addictive substance and, because of this, breaking a smoking habit isn't easy. However, quitting smoking will be an important step in improving your oral and overall health.

There are many different nicotine replacement therapy products (NRT) to help you quit smoking such as:

- nicotine chewing gum
- patches
- nasal sprays
- inhalers
- lozenges

There is no evidence that using one method of nicotine replacement is more effective than another. However, there is strong evidence to show that using a combination of nicotine replacement therapies is more effective than using a single product alone.

For further advice and help to quit smoking please contact your doctor, dentist, local pharmacist or local smoking cessation service.

Reference - Statistics from Health Education and Promotion by Wiley Blackwell

Please ask if you would like this leaflet in larger print or an alternative format.