



MEDIA RELEASE

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HEALTHIER TEETH AND GUMS WITHOUT TOBACCO National Non-Smoking Week is January 20-26, 2008

More Albertans may choose to butt out with the introduction of new provincial legislation restricting smoking in public places. When they are ready to quit, Alberta dentists will be there to provide advice and support. The Alberta Dental Association and College (ADA+C) recently distributed a booklet titled *Counselling Patients Who Smoke* to its members.

"The dental team is well positioned to talk to smokers about oral health problems associated with their tobacco use," says Dr. Steven Patterson, an ADA+C member and co-director of the Tobacco Cessation Program at the University of Alberta. "There is a fair amount of evidence that shows many oral diseases are impacted or caused by tobacco. As health professionals, we need to be directly involved."

The effects of tobacco on teeth and gums ranges from mild conditions such as stain or discoloration of teeth and tongue to serious periodontal diseases or oral cancers. Gingivitis, bad breath (halitosis), receding of gums and other health problems are common side effects of tobacco use and are often precursors to more serious diseases. Chewing tobacco may also threaten oral health. The risk of serious oral diseases rises when a tobacco user is also a heavy drinker (75% of head and neck cancers are associated with a combination of cigarette smoking and drinking alcohol).

"The good news is that many of these conditions can be reversed when a person stops smoking, often in a short period of time," says Dr. Patterson. "The other good news is that there has been a decline in tobacco use by Albertans in the past few years."

Dentists are trained to recognize the signs of oral disease and encouraged to offer brief, minimal tobacco cessation intervention to their tobacco-using patients during dental appointments.

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Dr. Patterson recommends that all dentists and other health professionals use the five As:

1. ASK if they smoke or chew tobacco.
2. ADVISE them about the harmful effects to oral health.
3. ASSESS their willingness to quit.
4. ASSIST those wanting to quit by referring them to resources and programs.
5. ARRANGE for follow-up phone calls and support as they attempt to quit

“We are not there to hassle, but to help,” says Dr. Patterson. “If someone isn’t ready to stop using tobacco, we are there to offer support and help prepare them for making that decision in future. We know it’s not easy to quit, but if you’re ready to try, we’re on your side.”

For further information on oral health and smoking, talk to your dentist or go to the Alberta Dental Association and College website www.abda.ab.ca or Canadian Dental Association http://www.cda-adc.ca/en/oral_health/complications/tobacco/index.asp

Backgrounder available

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Oral Health and Smoking

Smoking tobacco can cause serious health problems and can also affect the appearance and health of your mouth and gums.

Side Effects

Tobacco products damage gum tissue and expose tooth roots. Other side effects include:

- Nicotine addiction
- Reduced sense of smell and taste
- Bad breath; stained teeth and recession of the gum line
- Accumulation of tartar (calculus) and plaque
- Increased sensitivity to hot and cold
- Delayed healing after dental work
- Increased heart rate
- Possible breathing difficulties and/or a "smoker's cough"

Risk Factors

No matter how long you have smoked, quitting can quickly decrease your risk of developing:

- Oral and pharyngeal (throat) cancers
- Cancers of the lungs and/or other parts of the body
- Heart disease and/or stroke
- Chronic bronchitis, emphysema
- Periodontitis and tooth decay
- Premature aging
- Mouth sores or lesions that do not heal (leukoplakia)

How To Quit

- Talk to your dentist and your doctor about developing a strategy to quit.
- Have your dentist screen you for early signs of oral cancer and periodontal disease.
- Anticipate triggers to smoking and prepare strategies on how to avoid them.
- Reward yourself for reaching small goals — go out for dinner or buy yourself a gift.
- Chew sugarless gum and drink water when cravings hit.
- Incorporate exercise into your weekly routine and eat more fruits and vegetables.