



alberta dental
association + college

December 17, 2009

INFORMATION BULLETIN

QUITTING SMOKING THIS NEW YEAR'S? YOU'LL HAVE HEALTHIER TEETH AND GUMS

Quitting smoking is high on some people's New Year's Resolutions list. If you are one of them, Alberta dentists will be there to provide advice and support.

Tobacco use is a significant contributing factor to dental disease and dentists are well positioned to assist patients in improving their oral and overall health by offering support to smokers who want to quit. Dentists are trained to recognize the signs of oral disease and encouraged to offer tobacco cessation intervention to their tobacco-using patients during dental appointments. In addition, the Alberta Dental Association and College developed the booklet *Counselling Patients Who Smoke* for their members.

"We are not there to hassle, but to help," says Dr. Steven Patterson, co-director of the Tobacco Cessation Program at the University of Alberta. "As dentists, we are against tobacco as a harm-causing agent and what it does to people's health. But we are on the side of our patients and want to do all we can to help."

For those making a serious quit attempt, the following items advice will maximize success:

- 1) Make a Plan- set a quit date, decide how you will address your triggers and stressors
- 2) Develop Supports- consider using proven products that assist with cravings such as the nicotine patch, nicotine inhaler and other prescribed drugs. Find health or dental professionals as well as family/friends who can give you support.
- 3) Avoid Relapse- three big causes of relapse back to tobacco use are a) stress, b) being around others who use tobacco, and c) moderate to high alcohol use. Plan for how you will deal with these issues.

"Do not kick yourself if you slip up a few weeks into the New Year," says Dr. Patterson. "Quitting tobacco is a process, not a one-time event. People need to be aware that for some it takes a number of serious quit attempts before they will be successful. Addictions are hard to overcome, but it can be done. The main factor needed is persistence."

-more-

The effects of tobacco on teeth and gums ranges from mild conditions such as stain or discoloration of teeth and tongue, debris build up on the teeth 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 often in a short period of time, when a person stops smoking, ," says Dr. Patterson. "The other good news is that there has been a decline in tobacco use by Albertans in the past few years."

National Non-Smoking Week is January 17-23. 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 to the Canadian Dental Association site at http://www.cda-adc.ca/en/oral_health/complications/tobacco/index.asp

Backgrounder attached

Media contact:

Kimberly McDonald

Alberta Dental Association and College

Phone: (780) 432-1012 or toll free 1-800-843-3848

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.