

Tobacco & Periodontal Diseases

TARGETING TOBACCO USE



You are probably aware of the devastating effects that smoking and tobacco use can have on the heart, lungs, and other organs. However, you might not be familiar with the whole other “mouthful” of problems caused by tobacco use.

For example, tobacco use is one of the most important risk factors in the development and progression of periodontal diseases, which are the main cause of tooth loss in adults. The sooner you take aim at your tobacco use and quit, the sooner you will hit your target of a healthy smile!

Tobacco users are more likely to have calculus, a hard substance that can only be removed from your teeth during professional cleanings. If this calculus is not removed and it remains below the gum line, the bacteria in the calculus will infect the gums and release toxins that cause

redness and swelling (inflammation). The inflammation and toxins cause destruction of the tissues that support the teeth, including the bone (see Figure 1). When this happens, the gums separate from the teeth, forming pockets. Smokers and tobacco users have deeper pockets than people who do not use tobacco. These



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pockets fill with more plaque and bacterial toxins leading to more infection. If these pockets are left untreated, the gums may shrink away from the teeth, making the teeth appear longer (see Figure 2) and possibly causing them to become loose and fall out.

The detection of periodontal diseases is often more difficult in tobacco users. This is because the nicotine and other chemicals found in tobacco hide the symptoms commonly associated with periodontal diseases, such as bleeding gums. Since the detection of periodontal diseases in tobacco users can be difficult, necessary treatment is sometimes delayed.



Figure 1
Black area above line indicates bone loss

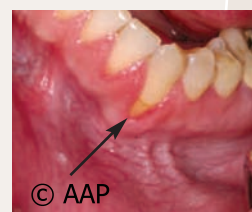


Figure 2
Gum Recession

Figure 1 Photo Credit: Vincent J. Iacono, D.M.D.

Figure 2 Photo Credit: Walt Colón, D.M.D., M.S.

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TREATMENT OF PERIODONTAL DISEASES

Treatment of periodontal diseases in tobacco users can be a difficult task, but not an impossible one. Smoking and tobacco use reduces the delivery of oxygen and nutrients to the gingival tissues weakening the body's defense mechanisms. This can slow down the healing process and make treatment results less predictable following any form of periodontal treatment. As a matter of fact, dental implants that are placed in a tobacco user's mouth fail more often than they would in a patient who does not use tobacco.

The actual treatment of periodontal diseases can vary widely depending on how far the disease has progressed. In fact, if caught in the early stages, simple non-surgical periodontal therapy, such as scaling and root planing, can be done. If the disease has advanced to the point where the periodontal pockets are deep and bone is lost, surgical therapy may be necessary.



Figure 3
Lip cancer



Figure 4
Stained teeth

OTHER ORAL CONDITIONS

In addition to causing periodontal diseases, there are many other oral conditions caused by tobacco use. Many of these can affect a person's appearance, health, or self-esteem:

Oral and lip cancer (see Figure 3)

Stained teeth (see Figure 4)

Bad breath

Loss of taste and smell

Mouth sores and spots

Black hairy tongue

Figure 3 Photo Credit: Joan Otomo-Corgel, D.D.S.

Figure 4 Photo Credit: E. Todd Scheyer, D.D.S., M.S.

TOBACCO'S HARMFUL FORMS

All forms of tobacco are harmful, so whether you smoke or dip you are more likely to have severe periodontal diseases and many of the other oral conditions listed above.

Cigarettes

There are more than 4,000 different toxins in cigarette smoke. Toxins impair the body's defense mechanisms, which can leave smokers more susceptible to infections like periodontal diseases. In fact, smokers are about four times more likely than people who have never smoked to have advanced periodontal diseases.

Cigars and Pipes

Despite the glamorous image portrayed with popular culture, cigar and pipe smoking can be very detrimental to your oral health. Recent studies have shown that cigar and pipe smokers experience the same adverse effects on periodontal health and tooth loss as cigarette smokers.

Smokeless Tobacco (Chewing Tobacco)

Users of chewing tobacco, spit or dip tobacco, and other forms of smokeless tobacco are not out of harm's way. Smokeless tobacco increases the risk of cancers of the cheek, gums, and lining of the lips by about 50 times. In addition, to hide the unpleasant taste, some brands of smokeless tobacco are heavily sweetened with sugars, which promote tooth decay. The tobacco leaves in the smokeless tobacco contain gritty material which can wear down the surfaces of the teeth and soft tissues of the mouth.

Hookah

In the past it was thought that hookah smoking was a safer alternative to traditional tobacco use because the smoke is filtered out by water. Studies now show that the inhalation of toxic substances through a hookah pipe is similar to or even greater than that of cigarette smoking.

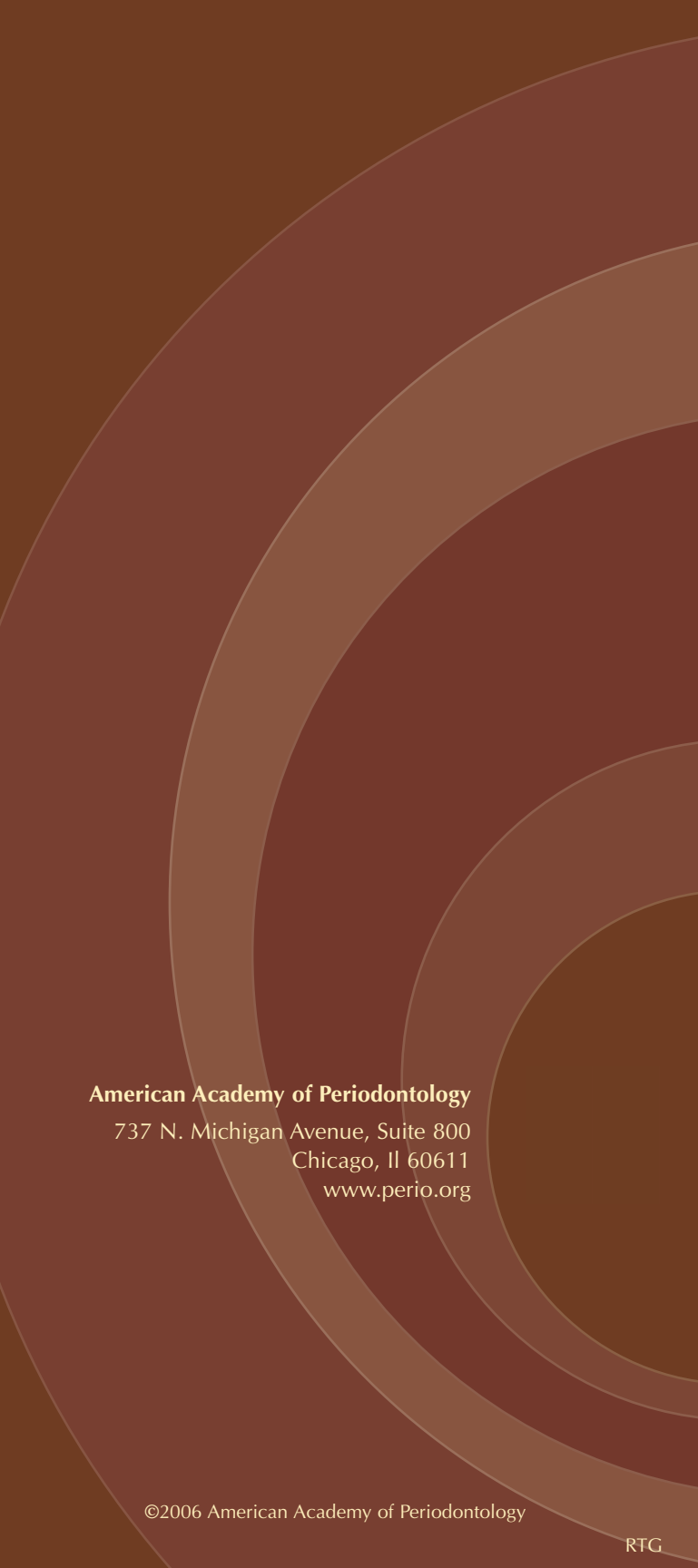
HARMFUL FORMS AND TIPS TO HELP YOU QUIT

TIPS TO HELP YOU QUIT

Because the treatment of periodontal diseases can be more difficult in tobacco users, your periodontist will urge you to target your tobacco use. Quitting seems to gradually erase the harmful effects of tobacco use on periodontal health. One study showed that 11 years after quitting, a former smoker's likelihood of having periodontal diseases was not much different from one who had never smoked. Smoking cessation takes a huge commitment and it is usually easier if you have help. To begin a tobacco cessation program, ask your periodontist or physician for more information on programs that might fit your needs. Other tips recommended to help you quit include:

- **Picking a stress-free time to quit.**
- **Asking for support and encouragement from family, friends, and colleagues.**
- **Starting some form of exercise or activity each day to relieve stress and improve your health.**
- **Getting plenty of rest and eating a well-balanced diet.**
- **Joining a stop-smoking program or other support group.**
- **Brushing your teeth often.**
- **Changing your daily routine and spending more time in places where smoking is prohibited.**
- **Keeping oral substitutes handy such as carrots, apples, and sugarless gum.**

Start taking aim at your tobacco use today and move one step closer to a lifetime of periodontal health and happy smiles!



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