

# Kicking the nicotine habit

**M**ark Twain once said, “Quitting smoking is easy. I’ve done it a thousand times.”

Few people would dispute that it can be difficult to quit using tobacco. That is because all forms of it—cigarettes, cigars and snuff—contain nicotine, which can cause addiction or dependence. However, it is possible to quit and never go back.

You likely know the reasons for quitting. You will lower your chances of experiencing a heart attack or stroke or developing cancer, including oral cancer. If you are pregnant or considering pregnancy, you will improve your chances of having a healthy baby. A smoke-free environment is healthier for those around you. In addition, the money spent on tobacco can be used for other things.

Dentists have long known that tobacco use affects a person’s oral health in bad ways—from tooth decay and periodontal disease to oral cancer. Signs and symptoms that could indicate oral cancer include the following:

- pain, tenderness or numbness anywhere in the mouth or lips;
- any irritation such as tenderness, burning or a sore that will not heal;
- development of a lump or a leathery, wrinkled or bumpy patch inside your mouth;
- color changes to your oral soft tissues (gray, red or white spots or patches), rather than a healthy pink color;
- difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking or moving the jaw or tongue;
- any change in the way your teeth fit together.

If these changes persist for more than a couple of weeks, visit your dentist for an examination.

Like cigarettes, other tobacco products contain a variety of toxins associated with cancer. Cancer-causing chemicals have been identified in smokeless tobacco products (snuff), which are known to cause cancers of the mouth, lip and tongue. Users also may be at risk of developing cancer of the larynx, esophagus, colon and bladder. Cigars pose a serious health threat as well. Even if users try not to inhale cigar smoke, they are still at risk of developing oral and pharyngeal (throat) cancers and periodontal disease.

## PLAN TO QUIT

- Set a date to quit and stick to it. Choose a low-stress time to quit.
  - Change the things around you. Get rid of all cigarettes and ashtrays in your home, car and workplace.
  - Do not let people smoke in your home.
  - Enlist the support of your family, friends and co-workers.
  - Ask your dentist or physician about products that can aid in quitting.
  - Seek tobacco-free environments to curb your temptations.
  - Exercise. It can make you feel better and will help take your mind off tobacco.
- When you crave tobacco, consider the “5 Ds”<sup>1</sup>:
- Delay: The craving eventually will go away.
  - Deep breath: Take a few calming deep breaths.
  - Drink water: It will flush out the chemicals.
  - Do something else: Find a new, healthy habit.
  - Discuss: Talk about your thoughts and feelings.

## RESOURCES

Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW, a free service from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to help people stop using tobacco. When you call 1-800-QUIT-NOW, a coach will work with you to develop a personalized plan and provide information that will help you quit. During the call, the coach may ask you specific questions about your quitting history, tobacco use and/or motivations for quitting. These questions will help the coach create a plan that will work for you. ■

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“For the Dental Patient” provides general information on dental treatments to dental patients. It is designed to prompt discussion between dentist and patient about treatment options and does not substitute for the dentist’s professional assessment based on the individual patient’s needs and desires.

1. American Cancer Society. Child and teen tobacco use. Helping your child quit. “[www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED\\_10\\_2X\\_Child\\_and\\_Teen\\_Tobacco\\_Use.asp](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_10_2X_Child_and_Teen_Tobacco_Use.asp)”. Accessed Sept. 3, 2008.