

Benefits Spotlight

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Stamp Out Your Smoking Habit

If you're one of the 42 million Americans who smoke cigarettes, it's not too late to quit. And you don't have to do it alone. Every year, millions kick the habit during the American Cancer Society's Great American Smokeout.

Here are just a few of the health benefits you'll enjoy once you quit:

Better breath. Cigarettes, cigars and even smokeless tobacco all contribute to halitosis, or bad breath. Sugar-free mints and gum can temporarily mask the stench of smoker's breath, but they can't eliminate it.

Whiter teeth. Tobacco products contain nicotine and tar, which cause light brown or yellow stains on tooth enamel.

Lower risk of tooth loss. Non-smokers have healthier teeth and healthier gums, which make them less likely to lose teeth than smokers.

Lower risk of gingivitis and other periodontal diseases. Smokers are two to three times more likely to develop periodontitis (gum disease).

Decreased tooth sensitivity. Smokers are more likely to have receding gums, which can make teeth more sensitive to hot and cold. Not only is tooth sensitivity an uncomfortable feeling, it can also limit enjoyment of favorite foods and drinks such as ice cream and coffee.

A better immune system and faster healing. Frequent use of tobacco can suppress the immune system and slow the healing process. And because using tobacco is a leading cause of gum disease, smokers typically have more extractions and more oral surgery than non-smokers.

Decreased risk of oral cancer. In 2016, approximately 48,000 people were diagnosed with oral or pharyngeal cancer in the U.S. — and 75 percent of these cancers are directly related to heavy tobacco and/or alcohol use. Even if you've smoked for decades, your oral cancer risk drops by 30 percent a year or two after you quit for good.

Giving up an addiction is challenging, and kicking the habit of tobacco use can be especially hard. But you don't have to go it alone — there are plenty of free resources to help you quit.

Visit smokefree.gov, call 1-800-QUIT-NOW or discuss smoking cessation options with your healthcare provider.

Brushing Up

Ever wonder what your dentist is really thinking? We wanted to find out too, so we talked to Delta Dental network dentist Dr. Jeffrey A. Sherman of Oakdale Family and Cosmetic Dentistry in Oakdale, New York.

Do you have a favorite floss flavor?

Mint-flavored floss seems to mask the taste often associated with flossing.

Do you prefer an electric toothbrush or a manual toothbrush?

I prefer an electric toothbrush.

When did you decide you wanted to be a dentist?

I wanted to be a dentist because I love working with my hands and enjoy science. My personal dentist inspired me and was so excited when I selected dentistry as a career. I have been in practice since 1973. I love what I am doing and have no plans to retire from dentistry any time soon.

If you could tell patients to stop doing one thing, what would it be?

I tell patients to stop holding objects, like nails and sewing needles, with their teeth.

Any funny stories from the dental chair?

A woman was visiting from Florida and went swimming in the bay. A wave came along and dislodged her dentures, and when she surfaced, her teeth were gone! She came in and refused to leave without a set of teeth. I explained it would take several days to get them back from the lab. She looked at me sternly and said, "I am not leaving your office today without any teeth, so figure something out!" I constructed a denture with relined material and some spare denture teeth until the new ones arrived from the lab.