Smokeless Tobacco and its Effects on Oral Health

“At least it’s better than cigarettes”—a commonly held belief that is, unfortunately, only too untrue.

Many people do not realize how addictive spit tobacco really is. In reality, a container of spit tobacco has as much nicotine as 80 cigarettes! That means people are easily addicted to smokeless tobacco, and continue expose their mouths to its harmful effects over time.

Can smokeless tobacco cause cancer?
Yes. In fact, smokeless tobacco contains 28 known carcinogens such as formaldehyde (used in embalming), nickel, polonium-210 (a radioactive material), benzo(a)pyrene, crotonaldehyde, cadmium (found in batteries) and other chemicals. (Not to mention spit tobacco products are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration [FDA], so there’s no real way to know what tobacco makers put in their products.)

The combination of these highly dangerous substances makes users more than 50 times more likely to suffer from oral cancers.

Other oral health issues
If you use smokeless tobacco, you’re also at risk for other health problems, including tooth decay from the high levels of sugar found in chew, bad breath, gum disease and recession (and eventually tooth loss), leukoplakia (white mouth lesions that are precancerous) and even heart disease.

“I’m not hurting anyone but myself.”
While the personal risks to a smokeless tobacco user are numerous, the effect of using smokeless tobacco has a much larger impact. Young children and teenagers who see their role models using chew during sports, races, rodeos, on TV and at home do so without knowing the health risks and addiction that results.

Ready to quit?
Set a quit date, gather a support group and don’t give up. Talk to your doctor and your dentist about how you can stop the dependency and enjoy a healthier life.

Tooth Tip: Choosing the right toothpaste
Most experts agree that as long as your toothpaste contains fluoride, it should work effectively to fight plaque and cavities. In addition, your toothpaste should bear the ADA (American Dental Association) seal of approval on the container, which means that the product has been tested for safety and effectiveness.

Additional guidelines are below:
Desensitizing toothpaste helps reduce pain when teeth encounter hot, cold, sweet or sour substances. These products make teeth less porous or help to deaden tooth nerve endings.

Tartar-control toothpaste targets yellow, hard deposits on teeth. After a professional cleaning to remove existing tartar, a tartar-control toothpaste can cut new buildup above the gumline up to 36 percent.

Antimicrobial toothpaste removes bacteria that can cause gum disease but it will not remove existing tartar.

Baking soda toothpaste leaves a fresh feeling in your mouth, which can be an incentive to brush longer.

Whitening toothpaste contains abrasive ingredients, forms of peroxide, enzymes and stronger detergents.