

# Give tobacco the boot

If you use tobacco, you are at risk of developing periodontitis, which can result in loosening or even loss of your teeth. Signs of periodontitis include red swollen gums (gingivae) that bleed, gums that seem to have pulled away from your teeth, constant bad breath or pus between your teeth and gums. You also are at risk of developing oral cancer.

Symptoms of oral cancer include

- pain or numbness in the mouth or lips;
- tenderness, burning or a sore that won't heal;
- a lump or wrinkled or bumpy patch inside your mouth;
- gray, red or white spots or patches inside your mouth;
- difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking or moving your 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. He or she will perform an oral examination and may help you put together a plan for giving up tobacco<sup>1</sup>:

- Set a quit date. Sooner is better than later.
- Once you've set the date, practice by avoiding tobacco use in the places in which you spend a lot of time—your car or specific rooms in your house.
- Tell people you are quitting. Family, friends and coworkers can be important sources of support.
- Be prepared for challenges, especially in the first few weeks.<sup>2</sup> During this time, you may feel the effects of not having nicotine. Withdrawal symptoms can include irritability, anxiety and even depression. However, keep in mind that these are temporary.

## HOW CAN I LIMIT WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS?

Talk with your dentist about products that are available to help wean you off nicotine.<sup>3</sup> Adults can buy over-the-counter nicotine replacement products, including skin patches, lozenges and chewing gum. Your dentist may be able to prescribe another delivery method, such as a nasal spray or an inhaler. Prescription medicines also are available that do not deliver nicotine but still help reduce cravings. Any product you

choose can have adverse effects, so talk with your dentist about the approach that makes the most sense for you.

## WHAT IF I NEED MORE HELP?

Some people benefit from counseling when trying to stop using tobacco. One resource is 1-800-QUITNOW (1-800-784-8669). The National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, Md., also has counselors available who can answer questions about quitting (1-877-44U-QUIT [1-877-448-7848]). If you are more comfortable talking with someone in person, you can seek counseling from your dentist or physician or from a trained tobacco-use treatment specialist. Contact your state tobacco control program to find out if there are any tobacco-use treatment programs in your state.

Although any one of these approaches can be helpful, studies suggest that people who combine counseling with medication or nicotine replacement therapy have an easier time giving up tobacco.<sup>3</sup> However you do it, give tobacco the boot. Quitting will greatly reduce your risk of developing tobacco-related diseases—such as oral cancer—as well as an early death brought on by tobacco use. ■

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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. Fiore MC, Jaén CR, Baker TB, et al. Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence: 2008 Update—Quick Reference Guide for Clinicians. Rockville, Md.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service; April 2009. "www.ahrq.gov/clinic/tobacco/tobaqrq.htm#Findings". Accessed Jan. 28, 2011.

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3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Food and Drug Administration. FDA 101: smoking cessation products. "www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm198176.htm". Accessed Jan. 28, 2011.