

Graphic Health Warnings on Tobacco Packages

Fact sheet 10: Smoking causes foul and offensive breath

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Smoking causes stained teeth, brown 'hairy' tongue and incredibly bad breath as well as many other dental problems. It also results in a reduced ability to taste and smell.

The main reason smokers have bad breath is because of the more than 4,000 chemicals found in cigarette smoke, many of which are harmful to the human body.¹ These chemicals include tar and nicotine, which build up on mouth surfaces such as teeth, tongue and sides of cheeks.

Heavy smoking can cause an overgrowth of the papilla on the tongue surface. This brown, furry growth traps germs and eventually creates a burning sensation on the tongue and exacerbates bad breath.²

People smoking 10 or more cigarettes a day have a far higher risk of developing Acute Necrotising Ulcerative Gingivitis (ANUG or trench mouth), a painful infection of the gums that results in bleeding, heavy ulceration and very bad breath.³

Smoking also dries the mouth by inhibiting saliva flow and function. Saliva is important for cleaning the lining of the mouth and teeth and protecting from decay. A lack of saliva can lead to the growth of bacteria, causing bad breath. Many studies have also shown that smokers tend to have more tooth decay than non-smokers.

Smoking can also lead to gum disease (periodontal disease) and increased tartar on the teeth, which harbours plaque. This can cause serious destruction of the tissues around the teeth, which can result in an unpleasant odour and tooth loss as well as pain. Smoking can also delay the healing of any injured tissues in the mouth, such as ulcers, or following oral surgery.⁴

Smoking can exacerbate sinus conditions, such as post-nasal drip (mucus dripping down the back of the throat), which also increases the risk of bad breath.

The easiest way for smokers to get over bad breath is to quit smoking. You and everyone around you will breathe easier.

Want to quit smoking? The most important thing is to make a quit attempt. For help, talk to your doctor, pharmacist, quit smoking provider or call the Quitline on 0800 778 778 or visit The Quit Group web site at www.quit.org.nz

Sources:

¹ Hoffmann D, Hoffmann I and El-Bayoumy K. 2001. *The Less Harmful Cigarette: A Controversial Issue*. A tribute to Ernst L. Wynder. *Chemical Research in Toxicology* 2001, 14(7): 767-790.

² Christen AG, Klein JA. 1997. *Tobacco and Your Oral Health*. Quintessence Book, Illinois. 1997.

³ Bergstrom J. *Cigarette: smoking as a risk factor in chronic periodontal disease*. *Commun Dent Oral Epidemiol* 1989; 17: 245-7

⁴ American Council on Science and Health. 2003. *Cigarettes: What the warning label doesn't tell you*. Second edition. New York, American Council on Science and Health, 2003.

http://www.acsh.org/publications/pubID.206/pub_detail.asp (accessed 11/02/08)