



British
Dental Health
Foundation

The British Dental Health Foundation is an independent, UK-based charity dedicated to promoting the benefits of good oral health to the public throughout the world.

The Foundation promotes three key messages:

- brush your teeth for two minutes twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- cut down on how often you have sugary foods and drinks.
- visit your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend.

Look for our 'Approved' symbol on oral health products. You can trust these products to live up to the claims on their packaging.



The Dental Helpline is the Foundation's own confidential advice service. Qualified dental professionals are available to answer your questions personally from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Or you can send us a question by email from our website at any time.

 **Dental
Helpline**
0845 063 1188
www.dentalhealth.org

It costs the Foundation £9 for every enquiry we answer. If you would like to make a donation, please send a cheque to the address below, or phone 01788 539793 to donate by credit or debit card.

**plain English
approved**
by the word centre

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Tell me about

Smokeless tobacco





Q What is smokeless tobacco?

There are two main types of smokeless tobacco: chewing tobacco and snus.

Chewing tobacco usually comes as leaves or plugs which you put on the inside of your cheek and chew. Chewing the tobacco releases the flavours and nicotine, and causes your mouth to make a lot of saliva. Users generally end up spitting this out. Snus is tobacco that comes as a moist powder, or is packed in small bags, and you put it under the inside of your bottom lip.

Both types of smokeless tobacco are very addictive and can cause serious health problems.

The ingredients in smokeless tobacco are a mixture of tobacco-nicotine, sugar, salt, slaked lime, spices and flavourings. They may release hundreds of chemicals and poisons when you use them.

Among these chemicals are many dangerous cancer-causing agents (called 'carcinogens').

Q Can smokeless tobacco be part of other chewing products?

Yes. Smokeless tobacco goes by many different names, such as:

- Paan Masala (Gutkha)
- Snuff
- Nass, Naswat or Niswar
- Snus
- Zarda
- Chaw
- Supari
- Paan
- Khaini
- Ariva
- Mawa
- Shammah
- Mishri, Moshery or Mishery
- Toombak
- Qiwam or Kima
- Chimo

Areca nut, ash and lime are some of the main ingredients used in these mixtures.

Smokeless tobacco is used mainly by people from South Asia, South East Asia, the Middle East and East Africa.

People who use it don't always know or use the term 'smokeless tobacco', so they often don't realise that the products contain tobacco. If you aren't sure, look on the packaging for names or ingredients we've mentioned above.



Q Is smokeless tobacco linked with mouth cancer?

Yes. Mouth cancer is the most serious health risk linked with smokeless tobacco. This is because of the large amount of cancer-causing chemicals it has in it. Over time, having these poisons released in your mouth could make you four times as likely to get mouth cancer.

One of the most dangerous and popular ingredients used in smokeless tobacco, is the areca (or betel) nut. This is used in 'betel quid' which is made up of betel leaf, areca nut and slaked lime. Research shows that people who regularly chew areca nut have a bigger risk of cancer of the mouth, pharynx, oesophagus, stomach and pancreas.



Smokeless tobacco users are especially likely to get throat cancer, as they regularly swallow tobacco juice. Cancers of the lip and cheek are also common, as the tobacco is pressed against the lining of the mouth.

Mouth cancer can appear as:

- a painless mouth ulcer that does not heal properly
- a white or red patch in the mouth or
- unusual lumps or swellings.

It is important that you visit your dentist regularly if you are a smokeless tobacco user. This is because part of your check-up will involve a full mouth examination when the dentist will look out for any of these signs.

How can smokeless tobacco affect my teeth and gums?

Smokeless tobacco is linked to a variety of oral health conditions. Because it is held in one area of the mouth for a long time, the risk is very high.

Like people who smoke, if you use smokeless tobacco you are more likely to have gum disease. Using tobacco causes more bacteria to grow in your mouth and can also cause your gums to become sore. Smokeless tobacco also causes your gums to shrink ('recede'), uncovering the roots of your teeth.

Smokeless tobacco users may also be more likely to have tooth decay. This is because the amount of sugars, acids and other ingredients in some chewing tobacco products harms the tooth enamel, and causes holes ('cavities'). Tooth staining and bad breath are other common problems linked to smokeless tobacco.



How can smokeless tobacco affect my overall health?

Smokeless tobacco also harms your overall health. The nicotine causes your body to make more cholesterol and, as a result, you are more likely to get heart disease and have strokes.

Because tobacco users are more likely to have gum disease, they are also likely to have other health problems such as:

- type-2 diabetes
- premature births
- dementia and
- respiratory (lung) disease.

As well as causing mouth cancer, smokeless tobacco may also increase the risk of cancer of the pancreas.

Is smokeless tobacco safer than cigarettes?

No, it isn't. Although many users still believe that smokeless tobacco is not as harmful as regular cigarettes, this is simply not true.

Like cigarettes, smokeless tobacco is a serious risk to the health of your mouth and to your overall health. Both contain nicotine, which is a very addictive drug. In fact, there is twice as much nicotine in smokeless tobacco than in an average cigarette. This causes problems for the heart by tightening blood vessels and raising blood pressure.

One can of chewing tobacco can release as much nicotine into your body as 60 cigarettes.



Q What are the health benefits of giving up smokeless tobacco?

A Giving up smokeless tobacco can bring many health benefits. Short-term benefits include a better appetite and good digestion, as well as better teeth and gums. Long-term benefits include less chance of developing a serious disease, such as heart disease or mouth cancer. The risk of dying from a heart attack is also lessened by giving up smokeless tobacco.

Q How can I give up smokeless tobacco?

A There are many ways you can give up smokeless tobacco. The important thing is to work out why you use it in the first place.

- You may use smokeless tobacco to help deal with stress and boredom. Dealing with stress in other ways can help you cut down. For example, you could try taking a walk, listening to music, doing deep-breathing exercises, talking with other people or joining social groups at local community centres.
- You may use smokeless tobacco to help with tooth and gum pain. If you have tooth or gum problems it is important to see your dentist for proper treatment instead of trying to deal with the pain yourself.
- Some people use smokeless tobacco because they think it helps with digestion after eating. If you do have stomach problems after eating, then drinking more water instead can help. Or your doctor will be able to offer counselling and treatment.

Q What will I feel like if I give up smokeless tobacco?

A You may find that giving up is even harder than giving up cigarettes. This is because of the higher levels of nicotine, which is very addictive.

When you try to stop using tobacco, your body still wants the nicotine so you might get 'withdrawal symptoms':

These can include headaches, tiredness, changes in mood, getting angry quickly and finding it hard to concentrate.

If you find it hard to give up smokeless tobacco, you can get specialist help. This can be nicotine replacement therapy, such as nicotine patches or gum, and support to help you cope with how you feel. A local stop-smoking centre can also give you support.

Q Can my dentist help?

A Your dentist will carry out a regular check-up to make sure that your teeth, gums and mouth are healthy. The dentist will also check your cheeks, tongue and throat for any signs of other conditions that may need looking into. Using smokeless tobacco may cause white, red or white-and-red patches that can be found at a dental examination. Your dentist may also be able to put you in touch with organisations and self-help groups who will have the latest information to help you stop using smokeless tobacco.

It is important that you visit your dentist regularly both for a normal check-up and a full mouth examination so that any other problems can be spotted early.

