- Diseases

# Smoking, gum disease

## ⊜ Partners in crime against your mouth

The Sun (Malaysia) · 24 Nov 2025 · 26 · This article is contributed by Dasan Swaminathan, who is an advocate of oral healthcare for all.

WHEN it comes to damaging your oral health, few factors are as destructive as smoking and gum disease. Together, they form a silent but deadly partnership that attacks the very foundation of your teeth – the gums and the bone that support your teeth.



How smoking fuels fire

Every puff of cigarette smoke introduces thousands of harmful chemicals into your mouth. These toxins do not just stain your teeth or cause bad breath – they weaken your body's natural defense system. Smoking reduces your immune response, making it much harder to fight the bacteria responsible for gum infection (periodontitis).

To make matters worse, smoking reduces blood flow to the gums as the blood vessels become constricted due to the smoke produced by smoking. This means less oxygen and fewer nutrients reach the gum tissue – the very things needed for repair and healing. As a result, infections linger longer and wounds heal more slowly.

Bacteria thrive where oxygen dies

Smoking creates an oxygen-poor environment in the mouth. This lack of oxygen gives rise to harmful bacteria that thrive deep under the gums. These bacteria produce toxins that destroy gum tissue and the bone that holds teeth in place. Over time, what begins as mild gum inflammation can progress to serious gum disease – with loose teeth, receding gums and eventually tooth loss.

Vicious cycle

Once gum disease sets in, it further amplifies the harm caused by smoking. The inflamed and infected gum tissues release inflammatory substances that speed up bone loss and tissue

destruction. This means that the longer a person continues to smoke, the faster the damage progresses.

The relationship is bidirectional – smoking makes gum disease worse and gum disease magnifies the damage done by smoking. It is a cycle of destruction that does not just end in the mouth.

More than just mouth problem

Gum disease in smokers is not just about losing teeth – it is a reflection of deeper health risks. The same bacteria and inflammatory chemicals that harm your gums can travel through the bloodstream, increasing the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes complications and even certain cancers. What happens in the mouth does not stay in the mouth – it affects the whole body.

Breaking partnership

The good news is that this destructive alliance can be broken. Quitting smoking is the single most powerful step you can take for your oral and overall systemic health. Within weeks of quitting, blood flow improves, oxygen returns to the tissues and your body's ability to heal strengthens. Combine this with:

Regular professional dental cleanings

Brushing twice daily and flossing Using antibacterial mouth rinses where required

Routine dental check-ups ...and you will be giving your gums the best chance to heal and your teeth a chance to thrive.

Message to community

Whether you smoke or know someone who does, remember: gum disease is preventable and recovery is possible.

Awareness is the first step. By understanding how smoking and gum disease work together to destroy oral health, we can make informed choices, support loved ones in quitting and promote healthier, brighter smiles across our communities.

Your mouth deserves better – break the partnership between smoking and gum disease before it breaks your health.