EFFECTS OF SMOKING TOBACCO IN THE MOUTH

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The Impact of Tobacco Use on Oral Health and the Role of Oral Healthcare Providers in Cessation Interventions

Tobacco use poses significant risks to general and oral health, making it a major global public health concern. The rise of novel tobacco and nicotine delivery systems further exacerbates this issue. Tobacco consumption increases the likelihood of developing oral diseases, including oral cancer, oral mucosal lesions, periodontal disease, and dental caries.

Dental clinics serve as an ideal setting for tobacco cessation interventions; however, many oral healthcare professionals lack sufficient training in tobacco prevention and cessation strategies. Enhanced efforts are needed to integrate smoking cessation programs into dental practice, incorporating brief educational, behavioral and pharmacological interventions. This review examines the adverse effects of tobacco on oral health and highlights the critical role of oral healthcare providers in managing tobacco dependence.

Oral Health Risks of Combustible Tobacco Products

Combustible tobacco products significantly increase the risk of oral and systemic cancers. Cigarette smoking is associated with malignancies of the oropharynx, larynx, trachea, bronchus, lung, and other organs. Cigar use, even without inhalation, elevates the likelihood of mouth and throat cancers. Long-term waterpipe (hookah/shisha) consumption is also linked to oral and lip cancers (Akl et al., 2015). Additionally, smoking contributes to periodontal disease, tooth decay, and dental staining.

Potential Oral Health Effects of E-Cigarettes

Although e-cigarettes are marketed as a less harmful alternative for adult smokers, their long-term oral health effects remain under investigation. Emerging evidence suggests that e-cigarette aerosols may adhere to oral tissues, promoting bacterial adhesion and increasing the risk of periodontal disease and dental caries. Users frequently report oral dryness, irritation, bad breath, and discomfort. While e-cigarettes may present a reduced-risk option for current smokers, they are not without harm, and cessation support should be tailored to individual needs.

Oral Health Consequences of Smokeless Tobacco

Smokeless tobacco products, including dip, snuff, and chewing tobacco, substantially increase the risk of oral cancers, particularly in tissues exposed to tobacco. Users often develop leukoplakia (white patches) and erythroplakia (red patches), which carry a high malignant potential. These products also contribute to tooth staining, gingival inflammation, and periodontitis. Cessation can lead to the regression of precancerous lesions, underscoring the importance of provider-guided quitting strategies (Ebbert et al., 2015). Tobacco use in any form poses severe risks to oral health, necessitating proactive intervention from dental professionals. Strengthening tobacco cessation training for oral healthcare providers and integrating structured cessation programs into dental practice are essential steps in mitigating this public health burden.

For Assistance on how to stop smoking, visit these websites:

- https://www.byegwaai.co.za/
- https://cansa.org.za/how-to-quit-smoking-and-why/
- https://heartfoundation.co.za/stop-smoking/#:~:text=National%20Quit%20Line%20%2F%20National%20Council%20Against%20Smoking&text=A%20telephonic%20advice%20service%20on,a%20personal%20guide%20to%20quitting.

References

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