Smoking and oral health—the unfiltered facts

In addition to the general health risks posed by tobacco, it also adversely affects oral health. Tobacco use in any form—cigarette, cigar, pipe and smokeless (spit) tobacco—increases the risk for a variety of oral health conditions, including:

- Periodontal disease
- Tooth decay, bad breath and stained teeth
- Partial and complete tooth loss
- Oral cancer

**Periodontal disease:** According to the American Academy of Periodontology, recent studies have shown that tobacco use may be one of the most significant risk factors in the development and progression of periodontal disease, also known as gum disease. In fact, smoking may be responsible for almost 75% of periodontal diseases among adults.

**Tooth decay, bad breath and stained teeth:** Regular brushing and flossing and visits to the dentist help prevent cavities and maintain your pearly whites, but if you smoke, it may not be enough. Smokers are more likely to get cavities due to the decreased saliva flow, increased plaque and tartar accumulation, and increased pH level in the mouth. Beyond the medical risks, persistent bad breath and stained teeth are just a couple of other unpleasant results of smoking.

**Tooth loss:** Studies have shown that smokers are about twice as likely to lose their teeth as non-smokers. Smoking may restrict blood flow to the gum tissues, limiting the delivery of nutrients which are necessary for the bone and gum support of the teeth.

**Oral cancer:** Of the more than 35,000 new patients diagnosed with oral cancer in the United States annually, only half live past the five-year survival milestone. People who use tobacco products tend to have a higher risk for oral cancer, and those who use tobacco products and consume excessive alcohol have an especially high risk.

Brushing at least twice per day, flossing regularly and stopping the use of tobacco are important to your oral and overall health. Talk with your dentist about concerns you may have regarding use of tobacco products and your oral health.