

Myth that snuff users today have fewer dental caries

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It is a myth that snus (Swedish snuff) users today have fewer dental caries. On the contrary, some types of nicotine-free snus contain both carbohydrates and starch that increase the risk of cavities. Those are the findings of a thesis from Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

A common notion is that people who use nicotine-containing snus have fewer cavities. But that notion is a myth. A fact proven by Lena Hellqvist, a doctoral student at Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg and a member of staff at Karlstad University, who studied oral health among snus users for her thesis.

"Normal Swedish snus containing nicotine is alkaline and therefore raises oral [pH levels](#), which could have a beneficial effect against acid attacks. However, there was no clinical confirmation during our studies that snus users have fewer caries today," says Lena Hellqvist.

"On the other hand, neither do snus users have more caries, which may be partially explained by the general improvement in [oral health](#) in Sweden and daily use of fluoride toothpastes. It is clear though that tobacco users visit the dentist and clean their teeth less often than non-users."

People who use nicotine-free snus products also have reason to be watchful. Lena Hellqvist's thesis reveals that while nicotine-containing snus only contains traces of carbohydrates and starch, nicotine-free snus

can contain up to 26 per cent starch and 6.5 per cent carbohydrates.

"Our figures showed that some nicotine-free snus products considerably reduced users' plaque pH. Together with the [high carbohydrate](#) content, this means that use of [nicotine](#)-free snus can increase the risk of caries," says Lena Hellqvist, who emphasises that the results only concern the products included in the study in question, and not necessarily all products available on the market.

The thesis also shows that tobacco use generally has fallen over the past 20 years, but that the number of snus users has increased in the same period – data supported by several other national studies.

The thesis also reveals that [tobacco use](#) is more common among single men than among men with a partner. There is no difference however when it comes to level of education or income.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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