

Smokers at higher risk of losing their teeth, research shows

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Credit: Vera Kratochvil/public domain

A new study has confirmed that regular smokers have a significantly increased risk of tooth loss.

Male smokers are up to 3.6 times more likely to lose their teeth than [non-smokers](#), whereas [female smokers](#) were found to be 2.5 times more likely.

The research, published in the *Journal of Dental Research*, is the output of a long-term longitudinal study of the EPIC Potsdam cohort in Germany carried out by researchers at the University of Birmingham and the German Institute of Human Nutrition.

Tooth loss remains a major public health problem worldwide. In the UK, 15% of 65-74 year olds and over 30% of 75+ year olds are edentate (have lost all of their natural teeth). Globally, the figure is closer to 30% for 65-74 year olds.

Lead author Professor Thomas Dietrich, from the University of Birmingham, explained, "Most teeth are lost as a result of either caries (tooth decay) or chronic periodontitis ([gum disease](#)). We know that smoking is a strong risk factor for periodontitis, so that may go a long way towards explaining the higher rate of tooth loss in smokers."

Smoking can mask gum bleeding, a key symptom of periodontitis. As a result, the gums of a smoker can appear to be healthier than they actually are.

Professor Dietrich added, "It's really unfortunate that smoking can hide the effects of gum disease as people often don't see the problem until it is quite far down the line. The good news is that quitting smoking can reduce the risk fairly quickly. Eventually, an ex-smoker would have the same risk for tooth loss as someone who had never smoked, although this can take more than ten years."

Kolade Oluwagbemigun, from the German Institute of Human Nutrition, said, "Gum disease and consequential tooth loss may be the first noticeable effect on a smoker's health. Therefore, it might give people the motivation to quit before the potential onset of a life-threatening condition such as lung disease or lung cancer."

The findings were independent of other risk factors such as diabetes, and are based on data from 23,376 participants which aimed to evaluate the associations between smoking, smoking cessation and tooth loss in three different age groups.

The association between smoking and [tooth loss](#) was stronger among younger people than in the older groups. In addition, the results clearly demonstrated that the association was dose-dependent; heavy smokers had higher risk of losing their [teeth](#) than smokers who smoked fewer cigarettes.

Professor Heiner Boeing, also from the German Institute of Human Nutrition, added, "In addition to the many noted benefits for cardiovascular health, and risk of lung disease and cancer, it is clear that dental health is yet another reason not to take up smoking, or to quit smoking now."

More information: *Journal of Dental Research* Dietrich, T. et al., 2015; [DOI: 10.1177/0022034515598961](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022034515598961)

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