

## Smoking and Your Appearance

Everyone knows that tobacco use, particularly cigarette smoking, wreaks havoc on one's health. What is less well known are the deleterious effects that tobacco has on appearance. Aged skin, brown teeth, oral lesions and bad breath are common among tobacco users. Understanding the cosmetic as well as the medical consequences can provide additional motivation to quit.

### Prematurely aged and wrinkled skin

Long-term smokers usually look much older than nonsmokers of the same age. However, until recently, the cause for this effect has not been well understood.

Everybody eventually gets wrinkles. Wrinkling is due to natural age-related changes of the skin. The amount and severity of wrinkles is dependent upon heredity, exposure to the sun and other skin-damaging agents. Recent research has shown that smoking, like excess sun exposure, greatly accelerates this aging process.

Smoking reduces blood flow and oxygen to the skin, resulting in marked decreases in the amount of vitamin A, which is essential for healthy skin. But scientists have now discovered that both smoking and sun exposure cause a protein called MMP-1 to be produced in high quantities under the skin's surface. Too much MMP-1 is a bad thing because MMP-1 breaks down collagen, which accounts for 70 percent of the skin's density, moisture and healthy appearance. In nonsmokers, MMP-1 is inhibited and kept at healthy levels by other genes and enzymes, which act in concert to maintain optimal collagen levels. Without adequate collagen, skin thickness and moisture decreases and wrinkles become both more prevalent and more pronounced.

Smokers who expose themselves to the sun for long periods of time due to work or leisure are doubly at risk for wrinkles and skin damage. It is also thought that chronic exposure to the heat from a burning cigarette may dry the skin and contribute to further wrinkling and skin damage.

Also, wrinkles first appear in most smokers around the eyes and lips. This is due, in part, to the factors described above but also because of squinting of the eyes and pursing of the lips while sucking and inhaling cigarette smoke. When skin is repeatedly creased from smoking, the cumulative effect is deep wrinkles.

Because of the early age of onset for most smokers, it is not uncommon to observe premature wrinkles and skin damage in 25- to 30-year-old young adults with less than a 10-year smoking history.

### Bad breath, stained teeth and more

Smoking or chewing tobacco-based products also causes bad breath, stained teeth and fingers, and irritates gum and mouth tissues causing unsightly and uncomfortable oral

lesions. Longtime spit tobacco users can develop a droopy lip causing them to drool unintentionally.

Focusing on the cosmetic consequences of tobacco use as well as the health implications has proven to be a successful motivator for many young adults and young women in particular.

Sources: National Institute on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; "Women and Smoking: A Report of the Surgeon General," 1991; "The Health Benefits of Smoking Cessation: A Report of the Surgeon General," 1990.

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