



Smoking May Put You at Higher Tooth Loss Risk: Study

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Representational Image

Berlin: Heavy and regular smokers have a significantly increased risk of tooth loss, according to a new study that found smoking can hide the effects of gum disease.

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, researchers said.

The research is the output of a long-term longitudinal study in Germany carried out by researchers at the University of Birmingham and the German Institute of Human Nutrition.

"Most teeth are lost as a result of either caries (tooth decay) or chronic periodontitis (gum disease)," said lead author Thomas Dietrich, from the University of Birmingham.

"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," said Mr Dietrich.

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.

"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," Dietrich said.

"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," he said.

"Gum disease and consequential tooth loss may be the first noticeable effect on a smoker's health," said Kolade Oluwagbemigun, from the German Institute of Human Nutrition.

"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," Oluwagbemigun said.

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.

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.

The study was published in the Journal of Dental Research.

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