

SUBSTANCE USE & ORAL HEALTH



People with substance use disorders have unique challenges with their oral health. Improving attention to oral health can lead to improvements in overall health and self-image as well as the vital functions of chewing, eating, and smiling. Oral health improvements may also make recovery more successful.



Substance use challenges to oral health

- Long term use of alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana can all cause oral health problems, including chronic inflammation, dry mouth, tooth decay, gum disease, and increased risk of oral cancer.
- Stimulants, such as cocaine and methamphetamine, can cause involuntary movements, which can lead to mouth sores and cracked teeth. A decrease in saliva production as well as loss of tooth enamel are also common from overuse of stimulants, and can lead to increased rates of tooth decay.
- Decayed and missing teeth are very common among people with opioid addictions. This could be due to poor oral hygiene, chronic malnutrition, or a number of health problems associated with substance use disorder that impact multiple organs and body systems.

Navigating the challenges



- People with substance use disorders often have acute dental needs, but may be reluctant to visit the dentist. It's important to be open with your provider about substance use to allow a full understanding of medical and social histories that can impact treatment plans.
- Anxiety is common among people with substance use disorders. The American Dental Association offers tips to help with dental anxiety.





Better oral health leads to better outcomes

- Improved oral health leads to improvements in other body functions and in self-image, which benefits recovery. People who worked on major oral health problems during their addiction recovery had more than an 80% increase in completion of their recovery programs.

Make a plan for better oral health



- [GrinGrant.org](https://www.gringrant.org) awards full dental restoration scholarships to selected applicants.
- The [Dental Lifeline](#) offers major dental care to applicants in selected Kentucky counties.
- The [American Dental Association](#) offers tips to help you find the right dentist for your needs.

Oral health supports recovery

Substance use disorders can greatly impact oral health, but taking steps to address oral health needs and seeking treatment can help support successful recovery and overall health.

