

# Dental Health & Oral Hygiene



**Think you know  
everything about proper  
brushing and flossing  
techniques?**

**Understand the basics  
and what you can do to  
promote oral health.**

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**A health coach can help you  
meet your healthy lifestyle goals**

**Call a TML IEBP Professional  
Health Coach at 1-888-818-2822**

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The mouth is a window into the health of the body. The mouth reflects general health and well being. Having healthy teeth and gums helps with eating well, enjoying good food, communication, social interaction, and overall personal appearance.

A combination of personal care and professional care is the key to a lifetime of good oral health. Early detection and treatment of problems with your gums, teeth, and mouth can make this happen.

Oral health can show signs of nutritional deficiencies or general infection. Oral health problems may be early warning signs of other medical problems such as diabetes, HIV, heart disease, or stroke.

## **Dental Health Facts**

- Studies show that obese people have a higher incidence of dental disease, just as with heart disease, obesity, diabetes and hypertension.
- Diseases such as diabetes, blood cell disorders, HIV infections and AIDS can lower the body's resistance to infection, making periodontal diseases more severe.
- Several studies link chronic inflammation from periodontitis with cardiovascular disease.
- People with reduced salivary flow are more susceptible to cavities.
- Neglect of oral health can have a negative impact on people with chronic diseases such as diabetes, affecting both health outcomes and quality of life.
- Severe gum disease affects about 25% of 65-74 year olds.
- Current smokers have poor oral health, and tend to delay visits to dentists.
- Cost was the reason that most adults with an oral health problem did not see a dentist in the past 6 months.
- A frequently overlooked reason for employee absences or poor work performance is dental disease or discomfort.

## **Signs & Symptoms of Poor Dental Health**

- Gums that bleed during brushing or flossing
- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Red and/or white patches on gums or tongue
- Sores that fail to heal in two weeks
- Gums that have pulled away from teeth
- Persistent bad breath or unusual taste in your mouth
- Pus between teeth and gums
- Loose or separating teeth
- Unusual tooth sensitivity to hot and cold
- Change in the way teeth fit together when you bite
- Change in fit of partial dentures

## **Risk Factors**

- Oral health may affect, be affected by, or contribute to various diseases and conditions. *Examples: endocarditis, cardiovascular disease, pregnancy, diabetes, HIV and AIDS, osteoporosis*
- Osteoporosis may be associated with periodontal bone loss and tooth loss
- Other conditions that may be linked to oral health include Sjogren's syndrome (immune disorder) and eating disorders
- Dry mouth due to medications, cancer treatment, or chronic disease
- Alcohol and caffeine can aggravate the effects of dry mouth
- Smoking increases risk for gum disease
- Chewing tobacco increases risk for gum disease and cancer of the mouth
- Stress can lead to:
  - tooth loss from grinding
  - TMJ dysfunction
  - canker sores
- Chewing hard foods and ice
- Lack of sleep
- Sadness, depression

Disclaimer: This material is for informational purposes only, and should not be used to replace professional dental advice. This information should not be considered complete, nor should it be relied on in diagnosing or treating a dental condition.

# Dental Health & Oral Hygiene

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## Regular Visits to the Dentist

- Professional cleanings are the only way to remove calculus (tartar), which traps plaque bacteria along and under the gum line.
- Tell your dentist about changes in overall health, both recent and chronic conditions.
- Inform your dentist if you are pregnant or planning pregnancy.
- The 2nd trimester is the best time to receive routine dental care.
- Provide updated health history and medications, both prescriptions and over-the-counter products.
- Tell your dentist if you use tobacco. Discuss options for quitting.
- See a dentist immediately before beginning any form of cancer treatment.
- Even if you have lost all your natural teeth, you should still see your dentist for regular oral cancer exams.
- Tell your dentist if you have a heart condition or artificial joint, as you may need to take an antibiotic before some dental treatments.

## Questions to Ask the Dentist

- How do nutrition and diet affect my oral health?
- Given my heart condition or artificial joint replacement, do I need an antibiotic before dental treatment?
- Should I be concerned about dry mouth?
- Do I need a mouth guard or mouth protector? What are the advantages?
- What are the out of pocket costs for mouth protectors? Is there an over the counter mouth protector that you would recommend?
- What are the signs of oral cancer?
- Should I use a mouth rinse?
- Are there risks associated with teeth whitening products?
- How do I practice good oral hygiene with braces?

## Complications

- Gum disease
- Dental cavities
- Burning mouth syndrome
- Tooth loss from stress or teeth grinding
- Tooth fracture from eating hard foods or ice
- TMJ (temporomandibular joint) syndrome
- Cancer of the mouth can grow in any part of the mouth or throat

## Prevention

Prevention is an important step in maintaining overall health. Dental disease is most often preventable, with the exception of damage due to an accident. Dental treatment begins with relatively low-cost diagnostic procedures such as exams and x-rays. If decay or disease is detected, the sooner it is treated, the less expensive that treatment will be.

## Treatment & Care

### Personal Oral Hygiene & Brushing Basics

- Brush teeth thoroughly twice daily with a soft, bristle manual toothbrush. Consider using an electric or battery operated toothbrush, especially if you have arthritis or other problems that challenge effective brushing.
- Always rinse your toothbrush with water after brushing. Store toothbrush in an upright position allowing to air dry before next use. Do not routinely cover toothbrushes or store them in closed containers, which can encourage the growth of bacteria.
- Get a new toothbrush with soft bristles every three months, after a contagious illness, or when the bristles are worn

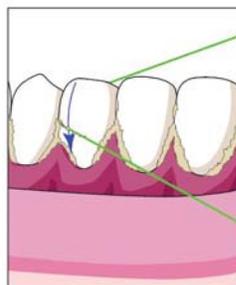
### Personal Oral Hygiene & Brushing Basics

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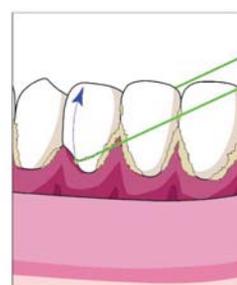
- Brush with ½ inch of a fluoridated tooth paste (pea size for children) for about two minutes with equal time devoted to teeth in the upper and lower jaw, both outer & inner surfaces.
- A water or dental pik substitute is a helpful adjunct to brushing and flossing.
- Your dentist may recommend using an antimicrobial mouth rinse daily.
- If you wear dentures, brush daily with a denture care product. Store them in water or denture cleansing liquid at night.
- You can lower your risk of getting oral cancer in a few ways: avoid tobacco products, drink only in moderation if you do, use lip balm with sunscreen.
- Choose dental products with the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance (important symbol of a dental product's safety and effectiveness).

### Flossing

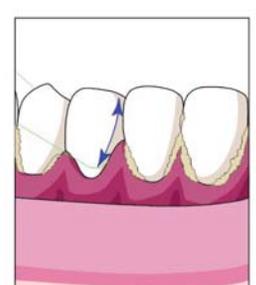
- Floss daily. Waxed floss is best for tight contacts. Break off about 18 inches of dental floss. Wind most of the floss around the middle finger on one hand, and the rest around the middle finger on the other hand, leaving about 1 inch to floss your first tooth.
- Take it one tooth at a time. Use your thumbs and forefingers to gently pull the floss from the gum line to the top of the tooth to scrape off plaque. Rub the floss against all sides of the tooth. Unwind to fresh floss as you progress to the next tooth.



1. Gently guide floss between the teeth by using a zigzag motion.



2. Contour floss around the side of the tooth.



3. Slide floss up and down against the tooth surface and under the gum line. Floss each tooth thoroughly with a clean section of floss.

# Dental Health & Oral Hygiene Behavioral Changes

## Helpful Websites

American Dental Association  
[www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)

Smoking and Oral Health  
[www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db85.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db85.htm)

The Best Foods to Strengthen Your Teeth  
[www.dentistry.net/dental-nutrition/food-strengthen-teeth](http://www.dentistry.net/dental-nutrition/food-strengthen-teeth)

Soda's Effect on our Teeth  
[www.dentistry.net/dental-nutrition/soda-on-teeth](http://www.dentistry.net/dental-nutrition/soda-on-teeth)

Stress and its Effects on Teeth  
[www.dentistry.net/dental-nutrition/stress-and-its-effects-on-teeth](http://www.dentistry.net/dental-nutrition/stress-and-its-effects-on-teeth)

Mayo Clinic: Dental Care Basics  
[www.mayoclinic.com/print/dental/DE00003](http://www.mayoclinic.com/print/dental/DE00003)

Health & Aging: Taking Care of Your Teeth and Mouth  
[www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/taking-care-your-teeth-and-mouth](http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/taking-care-your-teeth-and-mouth)

MedlinePlus: Dental Health  
[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/dentalhealth.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/dentalhealth.html)

EPA: A Statement of Concern on Fluoridation  
[www.nteu280.org/Issues/Fluoride/flouridestatement.htm](http://www.nteu280.org/Issues/Fluoride/flouridestatement.htm)

- Eating a balanced diet characterized by moderation and variety.
- Increase intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, fish, non fat dairy products, nuts and seeds.
- Avoid fad diets that limit or eliminate entire food groups, which can result in vitamin or mineral deficiencies.
- Limit snacks and high carbohydrate intake
- Foods that cling to your teeth promote tooth decay. When you do snack, avoid soft, sweet, sticky foods (cakes, candy & dried fruits). Better selections: nuts, raw vegetables, plain yogurt, cheese and sugarless gum or candy.
- When you eat fermentable carbohydrates, such as crackers, cookies and chips, eat them as part of your meal rather than by themselves. Combinations of foods neutralize acids in the mouth, inhibiting tooth decay. Example: cheese/crackers.
- Not all sweeteners are created equal. One sugar alcohol, xylitol, can actually protect teeth against cavities. Xylitol is a natural sweetener found in fruit such as strawberries, plums and pears.
- Always keep your mouth moist by drinking lots of water. Saliva protects both hard and soft oral tissues.
- Avoid ice and hard foods that can chip away or fracture teeth.
- Reduce or eliminate sodas or sugary beverages. If you do drink, use a straw to reduce contact with teeth. Rinse with water when done.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine.
- Quit tobacco. Work with your healthcare provider and health coach. Call 1-800-QUIT NOW or visit [www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov) and click on "smoking," or [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov)
  - If you have problems with dry mouth, try sipping water or sugarless drinks. Sugarless hard candy or sugarless gum may help. Your dentist or doctor might suggest you use artificial saliva.
- Manage chronic conditions. Follow your doctor's treatment recommendations and monitor as directed (blood sugar, blood pressure, etc).
- Learn to manage your stress.
- Use a mouth guard/ protector when engaged in physical sports that may lead to dental trauma (check plan for benefit eligibility) .
- Being aware of recommendations helps you make informed decisions about your health.
- Remember to keep out of pocket costs down by verifying coverage with Member Services at 1-800-282-5385.



## Finding Low-Cost Dental Care

Dental care can be costly. Make sure you are aware of the cost and what services are covered. The following resources may help you find low-cost dental care:

- Some dental schools have clinics where students get experience treating patients at a reduced cost. Qualified dentists supervise the students. Visit [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org) for a list of U.S. dental schools.
- Dental hygiene schools may offer supervised, low-cost care as part of the training experience for dental hygienists. See schools listed by state at [www.adha.org](http://www.adha.org).
- Call your county or state health department to find dental clinics near you that charge based on your income.
- Call 1-888-275-4772 (toll-free) to locate a community health center near you that offers dental services, or visit [www.hrsa.gov](http://www.hrsa.gov) (scroll down to 'Find a Health Center').
- United Way chapters may be able to direct you to free or reduced-cost dental services in your community. Call 211 to reach a local United Way chapter.