



Healthy Mouth, Healthy You

The connection between oral and overall health

Your dental health is part of a bigger picture: whole-body wellness. Learn more about the relationship between your teeth, gums and the rest of your body.



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Pregnancy

Pregnancy is a crucial time to take care of your oral health. Hormonal changes may increase the risk of gingivitis, or inflammation of the gums. Symptoms include tenderness, swelling and bleeding of the gums. Without proper care, these problems may become more serious and can lead to gum disease. Gum disease is linked to premature birth and low birth weight. If you notice any changes in your mouth during pregnancy, see your dentist.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Be vigilant about your oral health.** Brush twice daily and floss at least once a day — these basic oral health practices will help reduce plaque buildup and keep your mouth healthy.
- **Talk to your dentist.** Always let your dentist know that you are pregnant.
- **Eat well.** Choose nutritious, well-balanced meals, including fresh fruits, raw vegetables and dairy products.

Athletics

Sports and exercise are great ways to build muscle and improve cardiovascular health, but they can also increase risks to your oral health. Intense exercise can dry out the mouth, leading to a greater chance of tooth decay. If you play a high-impact sport without proper protection, you risk knocking out a tooth or dislocating your jaw.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Hydrate early.** Prevent dehydration by drinking water during your workout — and several hours beforehand.
- **Skip the sports drinks.** Packed with sugar and acid, these drinks wear down your enamel. If you're looking for electrolytes, try unsweetened coconut water instead.
- **Use a mouthguard.** Wearing a mouthguard can protect your face, jaw and teeth from trauma. It's a must if you play a sport that puts you at risk for collision with other players or flying objects.

Did you know?



Three-quarters of pregnant women report dental health problems, including bleeding gums and toothaches, but less than half of all pregnant women visit the dentist.



Olympic athletes have higher levels of tooth decay and gum disease than the rest of the population.



Tobacco use

You know that smoking is bad for your lungs. But that's not all. Tobacco use also has detrimental effects on oral health, including:

- Increased risk of cavities, gum recession and tooth loss
- Increased risk of gum disease
- Reduced ability to fight infection in the mouth and gums
- Slower healing of gum tissue after oral surgery or from injury
- Delays in the formation of permanent teeth (for children exposed to tobacco smoke)

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Educate yourself** about the harms of tobacco.
- **Adopt strategies** to change your daily routine.
- **Ask your dentist or physician** to prescribe you nicotine replacement therapies, such as a transdermal nicotine patch or chewing gum.
- **Avoid all forms of tobacco**, including cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco and water pipes.

Osteoporosis

Your dentist may be the first to identify osteoporosis. Signs of this bone disease, which primarily affects women over 50, can be observed in the mouth. Look for:

- **Bone loss in the jaw.** This can indicate bone loss throughout the body.
- **Tooth loss.** Losing teeth can happen when you have low bone mineral density.
- **Ill-fitting dentures.** Decreasing bone loss can make dentures shift uncomfortably. If you're in need of frequent refittings, you may be at risk for osteoporosis.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Increase your calcium intake.** Supplement your diet with dairy products, leafy green vegetables and calcium tablets.
- **Get enough vitamin D.** Opt for salmon, tuna and fortified milk and juices. Exposure to sunlight can also help.
- **Do weight-bearing exercise.** From jogging to tennis, these bone-building activities go a long way in boosting bone health.

Did you know?



Children exposed to secondhand smoke are more likely to develop cavities.



Around the world, one in three women over age 50 will experience bone fractures due to osteoporosis.

Heart disease

Did you know that there is a relationship between the health of your gums and your heart?

Treating gum disease can go a long way in lessening the impact of coronary artery disease, according to a study in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. The two conditions also share many risk factors, such as smoking, poor diet and diabetes. Regular dental checkups, professional cleanings and good oral hygiene practices can improve oral health, contributing to good health overall.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Brush and floss regularly.** You should brush for two minutes, twice a day, with fluoridated toothpaste, and floss at least once a day.
- **Eat a healthy diet** to provide essential nutrients, including vitamins A and C.
- **Avoid tobacco.** Both cigarettes and smokeless tobacco put you at risk for gum and heart disease.
- **Visit the doctor and dentist regularly.** Always follow your physician's and dentist's instructions about health care, including using prescription medications, such as antibiotics, as directed.

Diabetes

People with diabetes are more susceptible to oral health problems, including gum disease and tooth loss. Why? Diabetes can slow the healing process and lower resistance to infections, including oral infections. It may also be a two-way street: Serious gum disease may affect glucose levels and worsen diabetes.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Up your oral hygiene game.** Brush for two to three minutes, twice a day, with fluoridated toothpaste. Floss daily to remove plaque from your gum line and between your teeth.
- **Eat a healthy diet** to provide essential nutrients, including vitamins A and C.
- **Act now, not later.** Treat dental problems immediately. A cavity today might be a missing tooth tomorrow.
- **Talk to your dentist.** Make sure your dentist knows that you have diabetes and share your complete medical history, including any medications you are currently taking.
- **Maintain regular dental and medical visits.** Carefully follow your physician's and dentist's instructions about health care, and control your glucose levels.

Did you know?



Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of both men and women in the U.S.



One in 10 people in the world is expected to have diabetes by 2030, according to the International Diabetes Foundation.

Oral cancer

One of the most devastating diseases affecting the mouth, oral cancer kills nearly half of its victims within five years. However, survival rates are significantly higher the sooner the disease is discovered and treated. During your next dental visit, ask your dentist to do an oral cancer screening. He or she should check for lumps or irregular tissue changes in your neck, head, cheeks, oral cavity, and soft tissues of the mouth. See your dentist immediately if you notice:

- A sore that persists longer than two weeks
- Swelling, growths or a lump in or around the mouth or neck
- White or red patches in the mouth or on the lips
- Bleeding from the mouth or throat
- Difficulty swallowing or persistent hoarseness

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Say no to tobacco.** Quit smoking or using chewing tobacco.
- **Drink less.** Limit or eliminate your alcohol intake.
- **Eat better.** Make sure your diet includes 4-5 cups of fruits and vegetables every day.
- **Gear up.** Use SPF lip balm when going outside.
- **Check yourself.** Examine your mouth regularly for any sores, lumps or changes of any kind..
- **Turn to a professional.** Ask your dentist for an oral cancer screening during your next exam.

Did you know?



Black men are at the highest risk of developing and dying from oral cancer.



If you drink and smoke at the same time, your risk multiplies, since alcohol increases the absorption of the toxic chemicals in tobacco.



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