

Dental problems affect more than your teeth and mouth. Gum (periodontal) disease and other mouth infections may increase the risk for:

- Pneumonia.
- Heart disease.
- Diabetes.

Also, an oral exam can help a dentist detect many health problems. These include diabetes, eating disorders, heart disease, osteoporosis, and a lack of vitamins.



Get more information from:

American Dental Association
www.ada.org

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDR)
866.232.4528
www.nidr.nih.gov

Regular Dental Care

Take Care of Your Teeth and Gums

Brush Your Teeth

- Do this twice a day. Brush more often, if you need to.
- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush and a toothpaste with fluoride. Brush with a gentle touch. If you have sensitive teeth, use a toothpaste made for this.
- Do a thorough job. Brush in small circles across all of the surfaces of the upper and lower teeth. Brush the outer, inner, and chewing surfaces. Brush the surfaces between the teeth.
- A child younger than 7 years old and some handicapped persons may need help to do a thorough job. A mechanical tooth brush may be helpful.
- Use a toothbrush that fits your mouth. Change your toothbrush to a new one every 3 to 4 months. Do this more often if the bristles are bent or frayed. Change it after having a throat or mouth infection, too.
- Brush your gums gently. Keep the brush perpendicular to your teeth.
- Gently brush your tongue. It can trap germs.



Floss Your Teeth

- Floss or use an interdental cleaner once a day to remove food particles and plaque from areas that your toothbrush cannot reach.
- Use a piece of floss about 1½ feet long.
- To floss your upper teeth, hold the floss tightly between the thumb on one hand and index finger on the other. Using a gentle, sawing motion, bring the floss through the tight spaces between the teeth. Do not snap it against the gums.



Regular Dental Care, Continued

- With the floss at the gum line, curve it into a C-shape against one tooth and gently scrape the side of it with the floss. Repeat on each tooth. Use a fresh section of floss for each tooth.
- Repeat for your lower teeth, but hold the floss between both index fingers.
- Rinse your mouth after flossing.
- If it is hard for you to use dental floss, use a dental floss holder sold in drugstores.
- After flossing, rinse your mouth with water, mouthwash, or an anti-microbial mouthrinse.

It is normal for gums to be tender and bleed for the first week. If the bleeding continues, see your dentist.



Dental floss removes food particles that tooth brushing misses.

Other Tips

- Protect your teeth from damage and injury. (See **Self-Care / Prevention for Broken or Knocked-Out Tooth** at www.HealthyLearn.com.)
- Ask your dentist if you should use a fluoride mouth rinse, a prescribed toothpaste with fluoride, fluoride supplements, and/or a water-pik device.
- Don't lay a baby down with a bottle left in the baby's mouth if the bottle contains juice, milk, soda, etc. Water is okay, though.

Get Regular Dental Checkups

See your dentist every 6 months, at least every year, or as often as your dentist advises. Regular dental checkups are important to:

- Clean your teeth and remove plaque and tartar that buildup even after you brush and floss every day. Removing plaque and tartar helps prevent cavities, gum disease, and other problems.
- Check for cavities, gum disease, oral cancers, tooth grinding, bite problems, and other problems. When these are detected early, they are easier to treat.
- Address any areas of concern.
- Find out how to take care of your teeth and what dental care products you should use.

Also, an oral exam can help a dentist detect other health problems, such as diabetes, heart disease, eating disorders, and osteoporosis.

Diet & Dental Health Tips

- If your local water supply has fluoride, drink 6 to 10 cups of tap water every day. If not, make sure to use a fluoride toothpaste.
- Eat a well balanced diet. Limit between-meal snacks.
- Eat sticky, chewy, sugary foods with (not between) meals. Finish a meal with foods that help buffer acid formation. Examples are cheese, meat, fish, nuts, and dill pickles.
- Avoid sugar-sweetened gum and beverages. Chew a sugar-free gum instead, especially one with the artificial sweetener xylitol.
- Don't eat sweets, fruit, or starchy foods just before bedtime. Your mouth makes less saliva during the night. This allows cavity-causing bacteria to feed on food particles. Brushing your teeth doesn't effectively prevent this.