



ORAL HEALTH

Oral health is an essential component of health throughout life. Poor oral health and untreated oral diseases and conditions may have a significant impact on quality of life. They can affect the most basic human needs, including the ability to eat, drink, swallow, maintain proper nutrition, smile, and communicate.



THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ORAL HEALTH AND OVERALL HEALTH

Cardiovascular disease: Research shows that several types of cardiovascular disease may be linked to oral health. These include heart disease, clogged arteries, and stroke. Although in some research, periodontal disease seems to be associated with heart disease, more studies are needed before the link can be confirmed with certainty.

Pregnancy and birth: Gum disease has been linked to premature birth. It is vital to maintain excellent oral health before and during pregnancy.

Diabetes: Diabetes increases your risk of gum disease, cavities, tooth loss, dry mouth, and a variety of oral infections. Conversely, poor oral health can make diabetes more difficult to control. Infections may cause your blood sugar to rise and require more insulin to keep it under control.

Osteoporosis: The beginning stages of bone loss may occur in teeth. Systemic loss of bone density in osteoporosis, including bone in the jaw, may create a condition where the bone supporting your teeth is increasingly susceptible to infectious destruction. Your dentist may be able to spot this on a routine clinical examination or with dental X-rays. If bone loss worsens, your dentist may suggest that you discuss the issue with other health care providers.

Courtesy: Mayo Clinic



WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MAINTAIN GOOD HEALTH

- ✓ **Drink fluoridated water and use fluoride toothpaste.** Fluoride's protection against tooth decay works at all ages.
- ✓ **Take care of your teeth and gums.** Thorough tooth brushing and flossing to reduce dental plaque can prevent gingivitis—the mildest form of gum disease.
- ✓ **Avoid tobacco.** In addition to the general health risks posed by tobacco, smokers have four times the risk of developing gum disease compared to non-smokers. Tobacco use in any form—cigarette, pipes, and smokeless (spit) tobacco—increases the risk for gum disease, oral and throat cancers, and oral fungal infection (candidiasis). Spit tobacco containing sugar increases the risk of tooth decay.
- ✓ **Limit alcohol.** Heavy use of alcohol is also a risk factor for oral and throat cancers. When used alone, alcohol and tobacco are risk factors for oral cancers, but when used in combination the effects of alcohol and tobacco are even greater.
- ✓ **Eat wisely.** Adults should avoid snacks full of sugars and starches. Limit the number of snacks eaten throughout the day. The recommended five-a-day helping of fiber-rich fruits and vegetables stimulates salivary flow to aid re-mineralization of tooth surfaces with early stages of tooth decay.
- ✓ **Visit the dentist regularly.** Check-ups can detect early signs of oral health problems and can lead to treatments that will prevent further damage, and in some cases, reverse the problem. Professional tooth cleaning (prophylaxis) also is important for preventing oral problems, especially when self-care is difficult.
- ✓ **Avoid dry mouth.** If medications produce a dry mouth, ask your doctor if there are other drugs that can be substituted. If dry mouth cannot be avoided, drink plenty of water, chew sugarless gum, and avoid tobacco and alcohol.
- ✓ **Oral health and cancer.** Have an oral health check-up before beginning cancer treatment. Radiation to the head or neck and/or chemotherapy may cause problems for your teeth and gums. Treating existing oral health problems before cancer therapy may help prevent or limit oral complications or tissue damage.

Courtesy: Centers for Disease Control



WHAT IS PERIODONTAL DISEASE?

Periodontal diseases are infections of the gums and bone that surround and support the teeth. In its early stage, called gingivitis, the gums can become swollen, red, and may bleed. In its more serious form, called periodontitis, the gums can pull away from the tooth, bone can be lost, and the teeth may loosen or even fall out. Periodontal disease is seen mostly in adults. Periodontal disease and tooth decay are the two biggest threats to dental health.

Causes

Bacteria in the mouth infect tissue surrounding teeth, causing inflammation leading to periodontal disease. When bacteria stay on teeth long enough, they form a film called plaque, which eventually hardens to tartar, also called calculus. Tartar build-up can spread below the gum line, which makes the teeth harder to clean. After this process, only a dental health professional can remove the tartar and stop the periodontal disease process.



Prevention and Treatment

Gingivitis can be controlled and treated with good oral hygiene and regular professional cleaning. More severe forms of periodontal disease can also be treated successfully, but may require more extensive treatment. Such treatment might include deep cleaning of the tooth root surfaces below the gums, medications prescribed to take by mouth or placed directly under the gums, and sometimes corrective surgery.

Warning Signs:

- Bad breath or bad taste that will not go away
- Red or swollen gums
- Tender or bleeding gums
- Painful chewing
- Loose teeth
- Sensitive teeth
- Gums that have pulled away from your teeth
- Any change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
- Any change in the fit of partial dentures

Risk Factors:

- Smoking
- Diabetes
- Poor oral hygiene
- Stress
- Heredity
- Crooked teeth
- Underlying immuno-deficiencies—e.g., AIDS
- Fillings that have become defective
- Taking medications that cause dry mouth
- Bridges that no longer fit properly
- Female hormonal changes, such as with pregnancy or the use of oral contraceptives

RESOURCES

www.cdc.gov/OralHealth

www.mayoclinic.com/health/oral

For more information visit
www.WellnessCoachesUSA.com