

Good Oral Health Improves Your Overall Health

Did you know that keeping your mouth clean makes the rest of your body healthy? Keep reading to find out what happens when you don't take oral care seriously.

The Basics of Oral Health

Tooth Decay and Diseases of the Mouth

Neglecting to care for your teeth has big consequences.

If not prevented, plaque from food particles forms on your teeth. The plaque produces bacteria that make the mouth more acidic. This acid breaks down tooth enamel, and leads to cavities and eventual tooth loss.¹

Also, when enough plaque builds up over time on your teeth, it hardens into calcified tartar, which can only be removed by a dentist or dental hygienist.²

Furthermore, poor oral health can cause gum disease. Gum disease causes bleeding and swelling of the gums. Eventually, bacteria and enzymes break down the bones and tissues that support your teeth.³ This can lead to tooth loss as well.⁴

Oral Health's Effect on the Body Overall

Neglecting your oral health causes problems in other organs of the body.

Heart disease (coronary artery disease) results when plaque (non-dental) build up in the arteries. Researchers have linked increased bacteria in oral plaque to the increase of the same bacteria in the arteries surrounding the heart.⁵

Diabetes is another disease linked to oral health. Those having difficulty controlling their blood sugar develop gum disease more severely and more often than those whose diabetes is under control. Improving oral health can also improve the management of diabetes.⁶

Even the health of a baby during pregnancy and birth can be affected by poor oral care. Researchers have found that pregnant women with gum disease are more likely to have their babies prematurely.⁷

1, 2. "Plaque," American Dental Association, <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/p/plaque>

3, 4. "Preventing Periodontal Disease," American Academy of Periodontology, <http://www.perio.org/consumer/prevent-gum-disease>

5. "Periodontal Disease and Systemic Health," American Academy of Periodontology, <http://www.perio.org/consumer/other-diseases>

6. "Diabetes and Periodontal Disease," American Academy of Periodontology, <http://www.perio.org/consumer/diabetes.htm>

7. Jeffcoat MK, Hauth JC, Geurs NC, Reddy MS, Cliver SP, Hodgkins PM, Goldenberg RL, "Periodontal Disease and Preterm Birth, Results of a Pilot Interventional Study," J Periodontol. 2003 Aug; 74(8): 1214-1218.

Staying Healthy Starts at the Top with Good Oral Care

Evidence shows that good oral health leads to better overall health. So when your gums, teeth, and mouth are healthy, it gives you something to smile big about. Below are some tips on how to practice good oral health.

How to Improve Oral Health and Prevent Tooth Decay

A clean mouth leads to a clean bill of health. Here are several options to keep your teeth and gums healthy:

- + Eat a well-balanced diet
- + Brush teeth at least twice a day with a soft brush and fluoride toothpaste
- + Floss at least once a day
- + Rinse thirty seconds twice a day using a fluoride mouthwash*
- + Brush your tongue
- + Have adequate calcium intake
- + Avoid tobacco products
- + See a dentist on a regular basis

Fast Facts

- + 120 disease symptoms can be detected in your mouth by a dentist.¹
- + 1 out of every 2 people in the U.S. has some form of periodontal (gum) disease.²
- + More than 75% of people over age 35 will be affected by some type of periodontal disease.³
- + Periodontal disease has been associated with a higher overall rate of heart disease.
- + Treatment of periodontal disease has been shown to improve the control of blood sugar levels in diabetics.
- + Pregnant women with periodontal disease may be up to seven times more likely to deliver preterm, low-birthweight babies, but the right dental treatment may cut their risk by 70 percent.^{4, 5, 6}

1. Department of Health and Human Services. Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2000.

2. American Dental Hygienists' Association. Dealing with Gum Disease: A Life-Threatening Health Risk, 2004.

3. McQueen, M.P. "Health Plans Expand Dental Benefits," Wall Street Journal, 2006.

4. Jeffcoat, M.K., Geurs, N.C., Reddy, M.S., Cliver, S.P., Goldener, R.L., and Hauth, J.C. "Periodontal infection and preterm birth: Results of a prospective study," J Am Dent Assoc. 2001 Jul; 132(7): 875-80

5. Lopez NJ, Smith PC, Gutierrez J. "Higher risk of preterm birth and low birth weight in women with periodontal disease," J of Dent Research (2002) 81(1): 5 8-63.

6. Jeffcoat, M.K., Hauth, J.C., Geurs, N.C., Reddy, M.S., Cliver, S.P., Hodgkins, P.M., and Goldenberg, R.L. "Periodontal disease and preterm birth: Results of a pilot interventional study," J Periodontol 2003 Aug;74(8):1214-1218.

How Healthy is Your Mouth?

A healthy mouth leads to a healthy body. Take this quiz and find out what you can do to improve your smile.

1. Do you brush less than once per day and floss less than several times per week?	Yes	No
2. Do your gums bleed when you brush your teeth?	Yes	No
3. Has it been longer than a year since your last dental visit?	Yes	No
4. Are you diabetic?	Yes	No
5. Have you had more than two fillings placed in the past two years?	Yes	No
6. Do you prefer eating sweets to eating fruits and vegetables?	Yes	No
7. Do you take medications that may cause a dry mouth?	Yes	No
8. Do you smoke and/or have more than two drinks per day?	Yes	No

Scoring Guide

A higher number of Yes answers to the preceding questions may put you more at risk of developing oral health problems or a worsening of your existing condition.

Learn How to Improve Your Oral and Overall Health

1. Do you brush less than once per day, and floss less than several times per week?

Brushing and flossing are the most important things you can do for good oral health. Together, they help remove bacteria and keep your mouth healthy.

2. Do your gums bleed when you brush your teeth?

Bleeding gums may be a sign of inflammation, and sometimes, infection. Infections can be caused by bacteria that live in your mouth, but regular brushing and flossing will reduce the number of bacteria, help prevent infection, help reduce cavities, and keep your teeth and jawbone strong. And there's more: studies have shown that oral bacteria are connected with an increased risk for heart disease, stroke, and the management of diabetes. So brush at least twice per day, and floss every day for oral—and overall—health.

Continued

3. Has it been longer than a year since your last dental visit?

Regular dental visits help keep your mouth—and your body—healthy. Just like your physician, your dentist is responsible for diagnosing and treating disease. Dental visits help detect everything from oral cancer to gum disease and tooth decay. However, it's up to you to take good care of your teeth and gums between dental visits—so brush, floss, and get regular dental checkups.

4. Are you diabetic?

Did you know that there is a connection between good oral health and controlling your diabetes? Those with diabetes are five times as likely to have periodontal disease or tooth loss than otherwise healthy individuals. Those with good oral hygiene may have better control of their diabetes as well.

5. Have you had more than two fillings placed in the past two years?

Having the occasional filling or crown is a normal part of restoring your oral health. However, if you always seem to need a lot of dental treatment, or have had gum problems in the past, you may want to make especially sure that you are taking care of your teeth and gums properly. Brushing with a soft toothbrush at least twice a day, flossing daily, and using a fluoride toothpaste will all help you minimize the need for additional work.

6. Do you prefer eating sweets to eating fruits and vegetables?

Candy or cantaloupe? For many of us, the answer is candy. However, most sweets are high in sugar. Sugar is oral bacteria's favorite food, and, after a sugary meal, bacteria give off acids that promote tooth decay and gum disease. While fruits and veggies also contain sugars, they are a much more nutritious way to satisfy a sweet craving—but remember: you'll still need to brush after a fruit or vegetable snack.

7. Do you take medications that cause a dry mouth?

Saliva is good for you. Not only does saliva wash away food particles that can stick and cause bacteria to increase, it also contains antibacterial properties. Many common medications can cause a dry mouth and reduce the amount of saliva present. Read about the side effects of your medications or ask your pharmacist, physician, or dentist if the medicine you are taking can affect your oral health. Your dentist or physician may prescribe fluoride supplements or saliva substitutes if indicated.

8. Do you smoke and/or have more than two drinks per day?

Alcohol consumption and smoking are bad for your mouth and your body. Regular smokers are at a significantly higher risk of periodontal disease and a slightly higher risk of cavities. Smokers who drink more than two drinks per day further increase that risk. However, one of the most significant problems for smokers and heavy drinkers is oral cancer.

Oral cancer is often detected only after it's been present for some time, which means that it's harder to treat and has a higher mortality rate. If you smoke, stop. If you drink more than two drinks per day, cut back. And, visit your dentist regularly—particularly if you notice any lesions or sores in your mouth. Your dentist can conduct regular oral cancer screening exams—remember, early detection is key for effectively treating oral cancer.