

Taking Care Of Your

Teeth & Mouth



Looking after your teeth and mouth is a way to ensure good health and less pain for your entire life. Thankfully, among all healthy life suggestions, tooth and mouth care is one of the easiest to follow through with. In fact, there is no reason - barring any genetic conditions or severe health issues - that you cannot keep your teeth for your entire life. Having said that, tooth care is so much more than about your teeth or how they look.

It's essential to understand how to care for your teeth, your mouth, and your health because it all goes together. Ignoring your teeth can impact your life in dangerous ways.

Poor dental hygiene can result in severe health complications outside of losing your teeth. Sure, people get upset when they must lose a tooth due to decay, but tooth health can affect the rest of your health too. For example, an infected tooth left untreated can abscess, and the infection can spread to your bones, brain, heart and other parts of your body, becoming a danger to your life. In fact, about 8000 people die each year in the USA due to a lack of dental health care.

To prevent problems, looking after your teeth the right way consistently is crucial. Using medically sound and researched information is always going to yield the best results when it comes to your healthcare, and especially tooth care. The main thing is that if you are paying attention, you'll notice changes in your mouth health and catch any problems sooner. This saves not only money but potentially your life.

The Importance of Mouth and Tooth Care

The good thing about dental issues is that most problems, like cavities and gum disease, can be prevented through proper tooth and mouth care. Dental hygiene is about so much more than an attractive smile, although that has benefits too. As mentioned above, dental hygiene can affect all parts of your life and health.

- **Chewing and Digesting** – Your teeth are for grinding down food so that you can eventually digest it. Not having teeth can adversely affect a person's nutrition because they lose the digestive benefits of chewing if they eat only mushy food.
- **Teeth Help You Speak Clearly** – If you have issues with losing teeth due to gum disease or cavities, it can affect your ability to speak clearly.
- **Tooth Loss Affects Confidence** – If you cannot speak clearly and you are worried about how you look, it's hard to be confident. If your teeth are healthy and cared for, you will naturally be more confident.
- **Poor Dental Hygiene Affects Relationships** – Due to factors that aren't always upfront, people who have bad teeth are often unable to maintain good relationships and have full social lives.
- **Tooth Loss Affects Face Shape** – If you lose teeth without getting replacements, you can lose gum tissue and also the shape of your face can change drastically. This can generate an enormous amount of pain, both physically and emotionally.

- It's Hard to Smile If Your Teeth Are Bad – Not only will the pain overcome you but if your teeth don't look their best, it can also affect your smile. Studies show that smiling more boosts feel-good chemicals and helps you have a better day.
- It's Harder to Get a Good Job – If you have teeth missing, it's harder to get a good job due to other people's biases. They may not even be conscious, but people do tend to hire people who are more attractive and teeth play a significant role in attractiveness.
- Tooth Care Reduces Disease – When you take care of your gums, mouth, and teeth, you'll reduce your risk of disease. Bacteria from infected teeth can infect more than your gums and body. It can cause illnesses that affect your brain, heart, nervous system, and more. You could even have a stroke due to poor dental hygiene.

In addition to reducing the risks of many diseases, good dental hygiene can reduce your risk of cancer, dementia, and premature birth in pregnancy. Studies show that gum diseases raise the risk of early delivery and miscarriage, and people with healthy gums can reduce their chance of Alzheimer's by 70 percent.

One of the best ways to ensure good mouth and gum health is to care for your teeth by eating a proper diet. Let's look at this next.

The Best and Worst Food for Your Teeth

The best thing about tooth health is that the food that is good for the rest of your body is also good for your teeth. Food that is bad for your body is also typically bad for your teeth. Eating a well-balanced diet that is as close to nature as possible - without additives, added sugar, and fake fats, is your best bet for creating and maintaining good health.

Onions and Garlic

These aromatics are excellent for oral health because they naturally have microbial properties that target harmful bacteria that can cause dental decay and gum diseases. Use them cooked and raw as often as you desire because you really cannot overeat onion or garlic.

Leafy Greens

No matter which type of diet you choose for your health, leafy greens are on it. Greens are rich in vitamins and minerals such as red blood cell-boosting vitamin C. The other thing is that since you have to chew a lot to swallow, it will cause you to salivate more which will help you get rid of food particles, plaque, and bacteria that often hang out on the gumline causing problems.

Citrus Fruit

It's perfectly okay to eat citrus fruit. Some people will say that it can weaken your teeth, but you're not soaking in it. You're just eating it. The vitamin C found in citrus is good for your teeth and gums. The acid in the fruit is good to help get rid of bacteria that cause tooth decay and gum disease.

Mushrooms

Many mushrooms such as shiitake mushrooms have lentinan in them. This substance is antibacterial and will stop plaque from building up on your teeth, thus preventing gingivitis and gum disease. You can eat mushrooms raw on top of a salad, and you can cook them with your onion and garlic too.

Crunchy Produce Like Celery, Carrots, Apples, Bell Peppers

This type of food is excellent for your teeth because when you eat these things raw, they will scrape away food that is stuck on your teeth and is causing plaque build-up. Not only that; the high fiber causes you to chew longer, thus helping you digest the rest of your food better too.

Dairy Products

Food that is high in calcium is good for your teeth because it can make your teeth and your bones much stronger. Also, the protein in milk and dairy called casein neutralizes acids that produce the mouth bacteria which cause gum disease and cavities. You should get at least one serving of dairy products a day. If you're dairy-free, you can use a vegan option that is fortified.

Sugarless Gum

One of the best ways to care for your teeth between brushing, flossing, and cleaning at your dentist's office is to chew sugarless gum. It helps keep your mouth moist by causing you to create more saliva, which in turn helps cut down on bacteria that cause diseases.

Fluorinated Drinking Water

Studies show that drinking fluoridated water reduces dental decay by 25 percent. Most people drink bottled water today, which is causing a rise in cavities and dental problems. Fluoride has been added to municipal water for more than 70 years, and there are no studies showing that it is dangerous. In fact, it saves money for most people due to the reduction of dental problems.

Sticky Sweets

It's not that you cannot ever have sugar again. It's just that you have to ensure that if you're going to eat something that sticks to your teeth, you should always clean your mouth directly after eating it. That means long-lasting candies are a terrible idea. They can also get stuck and break your teeth, causing even more issues.

Starchy Sticky Food

Anything that you eat that you've noticed seems to get stuck in your mouth - like soft bread, chips, and so forth - can stick to your teeth, causing spots that can end up with the harmful bacteria on them. Rinse your mouth after eating such items if you cannot brush your teeth.

Carbonated Sodas and Sugary Drinks

Even if it's orange juice, it's best not to drink anything with sugar in it - including sports drinks, Kool-Aid, and tea if you can avoid it. Sodas are especially damaging to the teeth due to phosphoric and citric acid which wear down your tooth enamel.

Alcohol and Medicine

Naturally, you may have no choice but to take the medicine that dries your mouth out, but alcohol is especially problematic. Studies also show that alcohol in mouth wash increases the risk of getting mouth cancer. The best choice is to reduce the consumption of alcohol and the use of meds that cause a dry mouth. You can also discuss your dry mouth with your doctor so that you can find treatments to avoid problems if this is a concern.

The best way to maintain your dental hygiene when it comes to food is to avoid between-meal snacks that are sugary and sticky and stick to drinking plenty of water and eating whole natural foods that promote health. Plus, keep flossing daily while brushing your teeth twice each day.

Taking Care of Your Teeth and Mouth at Home

It is essential to see your dentist twice a year for a check-up and a cleaning by the hygienist, but outside of that there is a lot you can do to look after your teeth yourself at home.

- **Floss Daily** – Less than 30 percent of the population flosses daily. The sad thing is, flossing is one of the best ways to ensure good gum health. It can prevent infections and the more serious complications from lack of good dental care.
- **Brush Twice Daily** – Brushing when you wake up and before bed is vital to good tooth health. After you wake up, it gets rid of any bacteria that built up in your mouth overnight. Before you go to bed, it reduces the number of bacteria that can run wild all night.
- **See Your Dentist Regularly** – For most people, seeing a dentist means going twice a year for a check-up and a basic cleaning. If you have no issues, that's all you'll need. If you start early, it may be all you ever need. Without dental insurance in the USA, this may cost about \$300 to \$500 per year per person.
- **Use Fluoride Toothpaste** – There is a lot of controversy due to the proliferation of health gurus without medical training all over the net. But for most people, fluoride is perfectly healthy and reduces cavities.
- **Use a Good Mouthwash** – Find mouthwash that does not have alcohol in it. Mouthwash without alcohol will help reduce dry mouth issues and will reduce your cancer risk.
- **Don't Smoke** – The additives and chemicals in cigarettes (including vape pens with nicotine) cause a dry mouth, which will make it easier to get an infection. Most smokers and vapers end up with periodontal diseases and have a higher risk of heart attack and stroke.
- **Cut Down on Alcohol** – As mentioned, alcohol can be very drying to the mouth. A dry mouth is a great host for bacteria to grow, leading to tooth decay and gum disease. Limit your consumption but also limit the number of things you put into your mouth that have alcohol added, like mouthwash.

- Report Changes to Your Dentist – A good benefit of flossing daily and brushing twice daily mindfully is that you'll notice any changes. Because of this, you can alert your dentist before something becomes more serious.

Finally, eat a healthy diet full of whole foods that have no added sugar or additional chemicals. Eating a diet rich in vitamins and minerals like calcium and vitamin C can boost your dental health exponentially when combined with daily flossing and brushing.

Dentist Versus Dental Hygienist

When it comes to dental healthcare, you'll need to find a dentist to manage your care. The dentist also has other people who work with them, and one of the most important of these is called a dental hygienist. You'll get to know the hygienist more than anyone else other than the front-desk person.

How It All Works

Typically, the way it works is that you'll make an appointment with the dentist. He or she will direct and supervise the hygienist who will provide treatment for your teeth, gums, and mouth in accordance with instructions. While you do make an appointment with the dentist, you'll usually see the hygienist first. They are all under one roof, employed by the dentist.

Hygienists are responsible for cleaning your teeth at your twice-yearly appointments. They work independently but directly with your dentist. The dentist will do the final check after your cleaning is complete to ensure you have no additional problems such as cavities, gum problems, sores, moles, teeth cracks, and so forth. The dentist manages your care, but others help. You may see others in the office who take x-rays too, or who help the dentist and the hygienist care for you.

A dentist is a medical doctor whose specialty is anything involving the mouth, gums, and teeth. This is very important because poor dental health is a sign of more problems and can lead to stroke and other cardiovascular illnesses if left untreated. Also, mouth cancers are very hard to diagnose early for people who don't see a dentist regularly. Early detection in this case is key to long-term survival.

When you make your first appointment, you'll usually see other people before you even meet the dentist. That's a good thing. The only time you need the dentist outside of each check-up at the end of your cleaning is if something is wrong. Most of the time, you'll deal mostly with the other staff in the dental office, unless you need a filling or other procedure that only the dentist can do.

The dental hygienist will examine you while they clean your teeth in order to report to the dentist any issues they notice. In addition to scraping your teeth, they'll floss and polish them. They may also use a device to check for gum issues. If they note concerns, the hygienist will not give you any diagnosis. They'll pass that information on to the dentist who will double-check, prioritize your treatment plan, and then turn most treatments over to the hygienist and others who can perform specific procedures, or they'll do the procedure themselves if it calls for it.

Some practices also employ dental therapists. These are highly trained individuals who can do fillings, pull some teeth, and do a lot of what a dentist can do under the supervision of a dentist. If your dental practice has a dental therapist, it can be a useful way to save money on treatments that don't really call for a doctor.

Do Your Due Diligence

For proper dental care, make an appointment with a dentist near you. You'll want to go twice a year starting at two years old, or in some cases when the first tooth pops through. Starting early ensures a less traumatic experience and a higher chance of good gum and teeth health for life.

If you don't have dental insurance, don't worry. Most people don't have it, but dentists can work with you on payments. You can also possibly qualify for a care credit card to help you pay for your twice-yearly needs. Ask the staff when you call for your appointment about payment options, costs, and more information. Unlike your regular doctor, they will give you a correct quote for your care.

The dentist employs the staff that can help you with cleanings and other issues that you may need to be taken care of when it comes to looking after your teeth. Finding a dentist that you can use year after year is also very helpful in terms of ensuring continuity of care. Do your due diligence to ensure that the dentist you choose has state-of-the-art equipment and a high rating, and you'll be a lot happier with the results.

Common Teeth, Gum and Mouth Problems

While these are common issues for the teeth, gums, and mouth, it doesn't mean that you will have any of these issues. However, throughout a lifetime, most people will face these issues sooner or later. With good tooth and mouth care, you can mitigate many problems or at least lessen their impact.

- **Toothache** – If your tooth hurts, or the area near the tooth hurts, it's essential to see your dentist as soon as possible. You can try flossing, rinsing, and using Tylenol for pain until you can get in to see them.
- **Discolored Teeth** – While not a health issue, discolored teeth can be a sign of other health issues. It may be a stain, in which case your dentist has treatments that they can recommend. However, if it's not a stain, it could be a health issue that needs to be tended to.
- **Cavities** – Not all cavities hurt or cause a toothache. Sometimes you just get small holes in your teeth that can allow bacteria to get into your bloodstream and make you sick. Getting a filling is the best choice to correct it. Brush and floss daily to avoid cavities.
- **Chipped Teeth** – While also not necessarily a health issue that causes sickness, a chipped tooth can provide an easy entry for bacteria to form a cavity. If you chip your tooth, getting it fixed sooner rather than later will not only save money but could save your tooth.

- **Impacted Teeth** – This is mostly a problem for young people who are growing their teeth, including molars and wisdom teeth. Sometimes these teeth don't have enough room to break through the gum, and it can cause pain and swelling. Sometimes an operation is needed to extract the tooth.
- **Cracked Teeth** – A cracked tooth can break at any time when you least expect it. This can cause a lot of pain or, sometimes, no pain at all. Having a cracked tooth fixed as soon as possible can prevent tooth loss and other issues. Usually, this means getting a crown. They are very expensive, ranging from \$350 with insurance to \$1200 without. Don't let that scare you, though; talk to your dentist's billing department as there may be options for cash payments that you don't know about.
- **Cold Sensitivity** – If you have become sensitive to cold things like iced drinks or ice cream, it's possible that your teeth enamel is damaged. You could also have cavities, gum disease, cracked teeth, or even exposed roots. Don't ignore this pain. Ask your dentist. If it's nothing serious, they'll recommend using a toothpaste designed to help desensitize your teeth.
- **Too Many Teeth** – This is one of many reasons for taking kids to the dentist yearly is helpful. If your child has too many teeth waiting to come in, a lot of pain and problems can be proactively prevented with proper dental care.
- **Crooked Teeth** – While some people think fixing crooked teeth is all about vanity, realize that it's a lot harder to keep crooked teeth clean through brushing and flossing than straight teeth. By getting the teeth straight, you can improve gum and mouth health exponentially.
- **Gapped Teeth** – This is not really a problem unless your teeth become gapped later in life. Moving teeth can be a sign of gum disease. Some people will only have shifting teeth as a sign.
- **Gum Problems** – If your gums swell, bleed, feel sensitive, or painful, it's always best to see your dentist as soon as possible. In the meantime, rinse your mouth with non-alcoholic mouthwash, floss, and brush. If it causes a lot of pain, skip that area until you see your dentist.
- **TMJ and Bruxism** – A dentist can help by creating a mouth guard for you to wear at night and even in the daytime if you tend to grind your teeth. However, you may need to see a specialist.
- **Cancer** – While not a common problem, it should be included because regular dental care is one of the best preventative measures against oral cancers. Early detection is key.

Visiting your dentist twice yearly for cleanings and a check-up while making an extra appointment the moment you think any of the above could be an issue is the best course of action to ensure the best mouth and tooth health you can have.

Signs That You Need to Visit the Dentist

Now that you know a lot of the common dental issues, it's important to know when you need to have them looked at. The following is a list of signs to look for that signal that you need to visit the dentist.

- **Pain with or without Swelling** – If you're experiencing mouth pain, don't let it fester. It can be something as simple as a piece of corn stuck in your gum, but it can also be something serious such as a cracked, broken tooth, a gum infection, or even infected and painful nerves being exposed.
- **Extra Gum Bleeding** – If you're not being treated for gum disease and you start having gum bleeding, or you are being treated but it gets worse, you'll want to call your dentist to make a special appointment to deal with this problem. In some cases, four times yearly scaling and root planing for gum disease is necessary.
- **You Hate Smiling** – If your teeth are "so bad" that you don't want to smile, or you find yourself covering your smile, consider seeking a dentist who can help you. There are specialty dentists that can deal with all sorts of problems.
- **You're Pregnant** – All pregnant women should go to the dentist. Tell your dentist that you are pregnant so that you avoid the x-ray portion of the visit. However, keeping gum disease at bay can ensure a healthy pregnancy, since gum disease contributes to early and low-weight births.
- **You Have a Two-Year-Old** – Your two-year-old should be ready to see the dentist for the first time. There are reasons for going this early outside of healthcare. It can help a child mentally if twice-yearly dental appointments are just part of life.
- **Your Mouth Is Very Dry** – Dry mouth can be a sign of other health problems, or it can be related to other meds you take. If your mouth is dry to the point of discomfort or bad breath, seeing your dentist can help.
- **You Can't Chew Your Food** – You may start noticing that you're having issues eating certain foods because of your teeth, either due to pain or something else. If your teeth are preventing you from chewing and eating food, see your dentist right away.

If you notice changes, pain, swelling, bleeding, discoloration, or any issue that concerns you, report those concerns to your dentist at your twice-yearly check-ups and cleanings. However, if you're having these problems between appointments, especially if you know a tooth is broken or there is a lot of pain and swelling, consider making an individual appointment to deal with the problem.

Fear of Dentists and How to Get Through It

Outside of public speaking, fear of the dentist is reported as something many people say they fear more than death. The problem is that most of the concerns that people report are either unfounded or due to an experience with a bad dental professional. To build trust and lessen your dental anxiety, here are some tips for getting over fear of the dentist.

Be Open about Your Anxiety

When you call to make an appointment with the dentist you've chosen to work with, tell them that you have dental fear and anxiety. Tell them what level it is, and if you already know what will help you get through it, tell them. For example, if you need to take breaks during a procedure, you need a friend to be with you, or you're going to need medication to help you, let them know.

Set Up a Plan with Your Dentist and Any Professionals Touching You

One way to deal with anxiety during treatment is to work out a communication strategy with the person giving you the treatment - for example, lifting your left arm to get a break. After all, your mouth is full and you cannot talk, which is part of what will cause anxiety in some people.

Learn Stress-Reducing Breathing Exercises

One reason people experience anxiety sometimes is due to not breathing correctly. If you have dental anxiety, chances are you're holding your breath without even realizing it. Become mindful about breathing air into your diaphragm and not your chest. One method is called triangular breathing. It involves breathing in slowly, holding the breath for a few seconds, then breathing out slowly through your nose.

Listen to Music

Some doctors have earphones that can block the sound and even play music. If yours doesn't, ask if you can bring your own noise-canceling headphones and music to put on during the procedure. But keep in mind that the less bulk, the better, because you don't want anything getting in the way.

Take Anti-Anxiety Meds

Depending on how bad your anxiety is, some dentists offer anxiety medications to help you. If your dentist doesn't provide it, sometimes you can work with your regular doctor to help you with one or two anxiety pills to get you through the appointment.

Get the Gas, Shot or Gel

If you're getting a procedure that calls for it, you can get gas and other pain relievers to help you relax. Today, most dentists put a gel in your mouth to stop the pain of shots, so even those aren't as bad as they used to be - just scary due to the long needle needed to get into the far back parts of your mouth.

When you choose a dentist to care for you (and anyone you love), it's imperative to check their ratings, their licensure, and any background information you can get. Also, if the staff are not willing to discuss payment, processes, and treatment with you to your satisfaction, pick someone else. Most areas have plenty of dentists to choose from, so there is no reason to stick with someone who doesn't have the newest technology and tools and an excellent bedside manner.

Other Dental Care Tips

Looking after your teeth is a healthy habit to get involved in that starts in childhood. However, you can start right now, ensuring the health of your teeth, gums, and mouth is maintained in the best way for yourself and your family.

- **Start Them Young** – Before your child even gets their first tooth, make it a habit to use a soft cloth to wipe off their gums with water daily. Once they get their first tooth, use a soft toothbrush every morning and night to gently brush away food from the tooth and gum area. Take them to the dentist by two years old or when their teeth come through.
- **Choose the Right Dentist for You** – Don't pick a dentist just because your family has seen the same one for years. Choose a dentist that will care for your health in the way you need, from payments to modern care using up-to-date technology.
- **Use ADA Approved Toothbrushes** – The American Dental Association has approved certain toothbrushes and toothpaste for cavity and plaque reduction. Using the ones that they've approved is always the best choice.
- **Consider an ADA Approved Electronic Toothbrush** – Some of the electronic toothbrushes that dentists recommend can reduce your chances of cavities and gum disease to almost nil. Do remember to use the products for the right amount of time and in the right way for the best results.
- **Consider an ADA Approved Waterpik** – Flossing is excellent, but many studies show that ADA-approved Waterpiks also work great to reduce bacteria and germs that cause gum disease and cavities. They help get food lodged in that even flossing can't reach between professional cleanings.
- **Find Insurance or Discounts** – Even if your job doesn't offer dental insurance, you can buy it on the open market. Look to your clubs, banks, credit unions, and memberships for information. For example, in many states, you can get dental insurance via Costco.com.
- **Add Dental Care to Your Budget** – Many people, when making a family budget, forget about adding dental care and lump it in with health care, even though most people have inadequate dental insurance.
- **Eat a Healthy Diet** – Focus on eating whole food that is low on the glycemic index (low in sugar) and that isn't sticky or starchy. Eat more crunchy foods like apples and celery for the vitamins but also for the crunch that helps remove germs from your teeth.

- Make Dental Care a Habit – The way you care for yourself each day is essential. You can go to the dentist twice a year and still have problems if you're not caring for your teeth daily. Set aside the right amount of time you need for self-care, so you don't skip it.

Now that you know what to do to care for your teeth, don't delay starting to make this a habit for yourself - and if you have them, your kids. After all, good habits start young, and that includes the practice of brushing and flossing, which is probably one of the most critical actions you can take at home yourself to maintain and improve your health.