DENTAL/ORAL HEALTH
April 2019

Dental/oral health can affect your overall health. The condition of your mouth can identify signs of nutritional deficiencies or general infection. Systemic diseases, those that affect the entire body, may first become apparent because of oral problems. Oral health has been linked with other chronic diseases, like diabetes and heart disease. It is also linked with risky behaviors like using tobacco and eating and drinking foods and beverages high in sugar.

Oral health affects our ability to speak, smile, eat and show emotions. It also affects self-esteem, school performance and attendance at work and school. Oral diseases—which range from cavities to gum disease to oral cancer—cause pain and disability for millions of Americans.

Dental professionals are trained to assess your mouth for these issues and advise you on the appropriate follow-up when they find a concern.

Some 100 million Americans fail to see a dentist each year, even though regular dental examinations and good oral hygiene can prevent most dental disease and regular dental care can identify the early warning signs of infection and systemic illnesses.

Dental Hygiene:

In addition to seeing a dentist regularly, good dental hygiene is important to maintain the health of your mouth and your body.

Dental hygiene refers to the practice of keeping the mouth, teeth, and gums clean and healthy to prevent disease. Dental hygiene and oral health are often taken for granted but are essential parts of our everyday lives. You can practice good oral hygiene by brushing your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, cleaning between your teeth once a day with floss or another interdental cleaner, replacing your toothbrush every three or four months and by eating a balanced diet and limiting between-meal snacks.

Basic Tips to Achieve and Maintain Good Oral Health:

**Babies**

- Wipe gums twice a day with a soft, clean cloth in the morning after the first feeding and right before bed to wipe away bacteria and sugars that can cause cavities.
- When teeth come in, start brushing twice a day with a soft, small-bristled toothbrush and plain water
- Visit the dentist by your baby’s first birthday to spot signs of problems early.
- For children younger than 2, don’t use a fluoride toothpaste unless directed by a doctor or dentist.

**Children**

- Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. If your child is younger than 6, watch them brush. Make sure they use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste and always spit it out rather than swallow. Help your child brush until they have good brushing skills.
- Teach children to floss regularly.
- Drink tap water that contains fluoride.
- Encourage children to eat nutritious meals and snacks.
Pregnant Women

- See a dentist before you deliver.
- Brush twice a day and floss daily.
- If you have nausea, rinse your mouth with 1 teaspoon of baking soda in a glass of water after you get sick. This helps wash stomach acid away and keep your tooth enamel safe.

Adults

- Drink fluoridated water and brush with fluoride toothpaste.
- Practice good oral hygiene. Brush teeth thoroughly and floss between the teeth to remove dental plaque.
- Visit your dentist on a regular basis, even if you have no natural teeth or have dentures.
- Do not use any tobacco products.
- Limit alcoholic intake.
- If you have diabetes, work to maintain control of the disease. This will decrease risk for other complications, including gum disease.
- If your medication causes dry mouth, ask your doctor for a different medication that may not cause this condition. If dry mouth cannot be avoided, drink plenty of water, chew sugarless gum.
- See your doctor/nurse practitioner or a dentist if you have sudden changes in taste and smell.
- When acting as a caregiver, help older individuals brush and floss their teeth if they are not able to perform these activities independently.

Some people don’t see a dental professional regularly because they believe that dental exams and treatment is painful but with dentistry's many advances, diagnosis and treatment are more sophisticated and comfortable than ever.

Visit the CDC’s website for more information at [www.cdc.gov/oralhealth](http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth)