

Healthy Habits

HEALTHY HABIT #9 Take good care of your teeth and gums

There's more to a healthy mouth than a nice smile. Experts now realize that poor dental health, especially periodontal (gum) disease, can contribute to disease in other parts of your body. In addition, symptoms for some diseases may first appear in the mouth. For these reasons, it is extremely important to eat healthy foods, take excellent care of your teeth and gums, and visit your dentist regularly.

Remember that our dental plan covers preventive and diagnostic services at 100 percent with no deductible, making it very affordable for you to have a dental checkup twice a year.

Eat healthy

- Whole grains
- Dark green and orange vegetables
- Fresh fruits, especially firm ones like apples and pears
- White meats and seafood
- Legumes, nuts and seeds
- Milk and cheese
- Water, especially with fluoride
- Limit acidic fruits like citrus varieties
- Limit sugars and salt
- Alcohol only in moderation

Changes begin in your mouth as soon as you start to eat certain foods, and bacteria in your mouth make dental plaque become more acidic, which starts the process that can lead to cavities. Limit between-meal snacking, especially sugary foods and drinks, to reduce the amount of time your teeth are exposed to acid. If you can't brush right away, you can help buffer the acid in your mouth by eating aged cheese immediately after other food or chewing sugarless gum containing Xylitol.

Brush for success

Even though you've been brushing your teeth since childhood, there's a good chance that you're not doing it correctly. Ask your dentist or hygienist to show you the best way to brush.

- Brush after each meal, if possible, or at least in the morning and before going to bed at night, but no more than three times a day.
- Brush lightly – brushing too hard or too often can cause gums to recede.
- Brush for at least two minutes.
- Use a standard brushing routine so you won't miss parts of your mouth.

- Always use a toothbrush with soft or extra-soft bristles.
- Change your toothbrush regularly, every three months or when bristles begin to splay. If bristles flare much sooner than three months, you may be brushing too hard.
- Choose a brush with an American Dental Association seal of approval.
- Choose the right toothpaste.

Don't forget to floss

There is more to flossing than you may think. Be sure to ask your dental health professional to show you how.

- Floss thoroughly at least once a day.
- Take enough time to do the job right.
- Use enough floss – a fresh section for every tooth.
- Choose the kind of floss that works best for you.

Conditions with a connection to oral health

- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Premature birth
- Osteoporosis



Questions to ask your dentist:

- What do I need to know about my health history to evaluate my oral health?
- What are the signs to look for in my mouth that might indicate a health problem?
- Have you seen any warning signs of a possible serious condition that I should relay to my doctor?