



# Regular dental care

Dental problems affect more than your teeth and mouth. Gum (periodontal) disease and other mouth infections may increase the risk for:

- Pneumonia
- Heart disease
- Diabetes

An oral exam can also help a dentist detect many health problems.

## BRUSH YOUR TEETH

- Do this twice a day. Brush more often, if you need to.
- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush and a toothpaste with fluoride. Brush with a gentle touch. If you have sensitive teeth, use a toothpaste made for this.
- Do a thorough job. Brush in small circles across all of the surfaces of the upper and lower teeth. Brush all sides of each tooth, including the surfaces between the teeth.
- A child younger than 7 years old and some disabled persons may need help to do a thorough job. An electric toothbrush may be helpful.
- Use a toothbrush that fits your mouth. Change your toothbrush to a new one every 3 to 4 months. Do this more often if the bristles are bent or frayed. Change it after having a throat or mouth infection, too.
- Brush your gums gently. Keep the brush perpendicular to your teeth.
- Gently brush your tongue. It can trap germs.



## FLOSS YOUR TEETH

- Floss or use an interdental cleaner once a day to remove food particles and plaque from areas that your toothbrush cannot reach.
- Use a piece of floss about 1-1/2 feet long.
- To floss your upper teeth, hold the floss tightly between the thumb on one hand and index finger on the other. Using a gentle, sawing motion, bring the floss through the tight spaces between the teeth. Do not snap it against the gums.
- With the floss at the gum line, curve it into a C-shape against one tooth and gently scrape the side of it with the floss. Repeat on each tooth. Use a fresh section of floss for each tooth.
- Repeat for your lower teeth, but hold the floss between both index fingers.
- If it is hard for you to use dental floss, use a dental floss holder sold in drugstores.
- Rinse your mouth after flossing.
- After flossing, rinse your mouth with water, mouthwash, or an anti-microbial mouthwash.
- It is normal for gums to be tender and bleed for the first week. If the bleeding continues, see your dentist.

## Other Tips

- Protect your teeth from damage and injury.
- Ask your dentist if you should use a fluoride mouth rinse, a prescribed toothpaste with fluoride, fluoride supplements, and/or a water-pik device.
- If you smoke, keep trying to quit until you are smoke-free. Smoking increases your risk of gum (periodontal) disease.



## DENTAL CHECKUPS

See your dentist every 6 months, at least every year, or as often as your dentist advises. Regular dental checkups are important to:

- Clean your teeth and remove plaque and tarter that builds up even after you brush and floss every day. Removing plaque and tarter helps prevent cavities, gum disease, and other problems.

- Find out how to take care of your teeth and what dental care products you should use.
- Check for cavities, gum disease, oral cancers, tooth grinding, bite problems, and other problems. When these are detected early, they are easier to treat.

Also, an oral exam can help a dentist detect other health problems, such as diabetes, heart disease, eating disorders, and osteoporosis.

## DIET & DENTAL HEALTH TIPS

- If your local water supply has fluoride, drink 6 to 8 cups of tap water every day. If not, make sure to use a fluoride toothpaste.
- Eat a well balanced diet. Limit sweets, sugary beverages, and in-between snacks.
- Eat sticky, chewy, sugary foods with (not between) meals. Finish a meal with foods that help buffer acid formation. Examples are cheese, meat, fish, nuts, and dill pickles.
- Avoid sugar-sweetened chewing gum. Chew a sugar-free gum instead to help increase the production and flow of saliva.
- Don't eat sweets, fruit, or starchy foods just before bedtime. Your mouth makes less saliva during the night. This allows cavity-causing bacteria to feed on food particles. Brushing your teeth doesn't effectively prevent this.