

1 Start with an American Dental Association approved soft-bristled toothbrush that fits your mouth.

2 Brush your teeth at least twice a day. Use toothpaste with fluoride.

3 Hold the brush at a 45-degree angle to the gum and gently move it back and forth in short strokes or in small circles across the outer and inner surfaces.

4 Brush chewing surfaces of the teeth with small circles.

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5 Brush your tongue to remove trapped germs.

6 Replace your toothbrush every three to four months, sooner if the bristles are bent or frayed (or if someone in the house used it to brush the dog's teeth).

7 Floss or use an interdental cleaner once a day to remove food particles and plaque from between and below the gum line.

8 Rinse with water, mouthwash, or an antibacterial mouth rinse.

9 Chew on this — sugar-free gum with the artificial sweetener xylitol. It'll help stimulate saliva flow.

11 Finish meals with food that help buffer acid formation. Examples include cheese, meat, fish, nuts, and dill pickles.

10 Check the inside of your mouth regularly for sores that don't heal and for irritated gums or other changes.

12 See your dentist every 6 months for teeth cleanings and oral exams to detect other possible health problems, such as diabetes, heart disease, and lack of vitamins.

