

Dental Health

Oral health is about more than just having a nice smile

Did you know bacteria from tooth and gum infections can travel throughout your body and affect your overall health? This is especially a problem if your immune system is weak, or if you have a disease, like diabetes. In addition, your mouth can be the first area to show the signs and symptoms of many potentially life-threatening diseases. This is why good oral health and frequent dental care are so important.

Good Steps to Oral Health

- **Brush your teeth.** Do it twice a day to remove bacteria that form on them. Scrape your tongue with either a toothbrush or tongue scraper for fresher breath. Children and people with disabilities may need your help to brush their teeth. Electric toothbrushes make this an easier task.

- **Clean in between your teeth.** No matter how well you use a toothbrush, bacteria and food hide in between the teeth and under the gums. Clean these areas by using dental floss or wooden toothpicks.

- **Use fluoride toothpaste** every time you brush. If you tend to get cavities, also use a fluoride mouthwash, and ask at the dentist's office for other fluoride products to help heal early decay.

- **Limit snacks like candy,** potato chips and soda because bacteria in the mouth use these sugars to cause decay. Any sticky foods that stay in the mouth longer, like raisins or corn chips, can cause decay.

- **Use an antimicrobial mouthwash** for 30 seconds to kill more bacteria if you tend to have gum problems. Be careful, because these mouthwashes also have alcohol and may not be for everyone.

- **Examine your mouth thoroughly** once a month. Look for any bleeding, lumps, swellings, red or white patches or sores that

do not heal. Call your dentist's office with any concerns.

Dentist Visits

- **Frequent visits for checkups** and cleaning will give you a brighter smile and fresher breath, and also will keep you comfortable and healthy. Nervous patients should talk with staff at the dental office about their fears, especially since modern technology can make procedures more comfortable.

- **Visit the dental office** more frequently if you have any health conditions, especially diabetes or HIV, or if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy. A tooth or gum infection could affect your health and potentially affect the health of your unborn baby.

Dental Issues at Each Age

- **Brush your child's teeth** as soon as the teeth come into the mouth. Children should see a dentist by age 1. Brush very young children's teeth using a pea-sized amount of toddler's toothpaste.

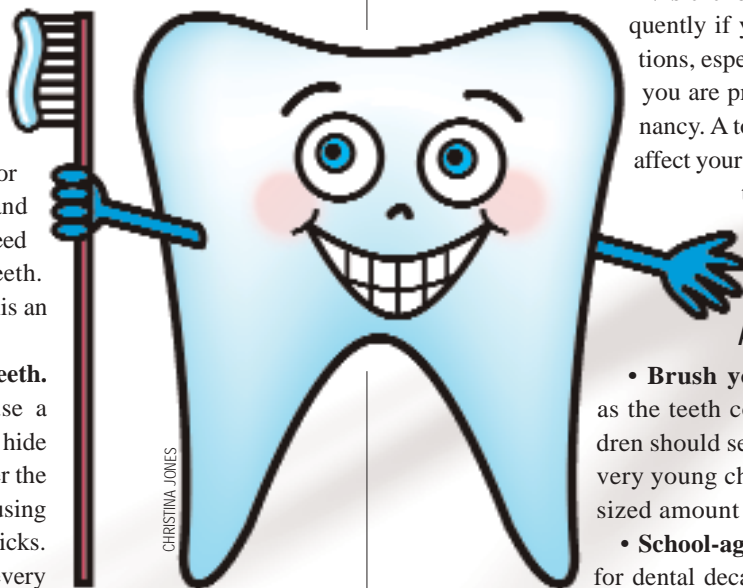
- **School-age children** are at high risk for dental decay. Cavities in the chewing surfaces of back teeth are the most common

and can be prevented with dental sealants. Sealants are plastic coatings painted on the chewing surfaces of the permanent teeth. As soon as your child's 6-year molars appear, visit the dental office for sealants.

- **Fluoride is found in tap water** in most cities. If you don't have fluoridated water, talk to staff at your baby's healthcare provider's office about fluoride tablets when the child is 6 months old. Also, many bottled waters do not contain fluoride. If you usually drink only bottled water or if your tap water does not contain fluoride, consider using a fluoride mouthwash.

- **Common medicines dry out the mouth,** and without saliva, cavities form more quickly. If you are taking any medicine, drink more water and stay away from sugared mints and candies.

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