



## ORAL HEALTH

Did you know that your oral health impacts on the overall health of your body? Your parents probably taught you from a young age to brush your teeth to prevent cavities and unsightly stains on your teeth, but scientists are now also finding links between oral and general health. Improper dental care may, for example, contribute to disease and conditions such as heart disease, dementia and respiratory infections, according to the *Mayo Clinic*.

### How can you protect your oral health?



#### Brush your teeth twice a day

When it comes to oral health, prevention is better than cure and less costly too. Brushing your teeth regularly will help to keep them white and stain-free. Dentists advocate a twice-daily brushing. Brush your teeth every morning after breakfast and again at night before going to bed. By brushing twice a day, you remove plaque from the teeth and maintain better oral hygiene.

#### How to brush your teeth

- › Place a pea-sized amount of toothpaste on the toothbrush
- › Place the brush at a 45 degree angle to your teeth and gums and sweep the brush along teeth and the gumline using backwards and forwards strokes
- › Clean the outer surface of the top and bottom teeth
- › Clean the inner surface of the top and bottom teeth
- › Clean the chewing surfaces of the top and bottom teeth
- › Make sure that you get to all the teeth at the back of your mouth
- › Brush for a full two minutes
- › Clean your tongue
- › Rinse your mouth and your toothbrush

#### Plaque and tartar

Plaque, a sticky substance that carries bacteria, builds up on teeth when we eat and drink. If left on teeth can cause gingivitis and tooth decay. Bacteria in the plaque also gives off acids which break down the tooth enamel, leading to cavities. If plaque isn't removed for prolonged periods, it hardens to form tartar both

above and below the gumline. Tartar cannot be removed by your toothbrush. Your dentist or oral hygienist will need to remove it using special tools.



#### Floss every day

Dentists advise patients to floss at least once a day. Flossing removes trapped food and plaque between the teeth and below the gumline and helps prevent tartar from forming. Floss is thin cord made from nylon or plastic. You can floss before or after you brush your teeth.



#### Replace your toothbrush regularly

Dentists advise patients to replace their toothbrush at least every three months. A good way to remember this is at the start of each new season. However, if your toothbrush bristles look frayed or damaged, replace it earlier. It is also a good idea to replace your toothbrush if you have had flu or an upper respiratory infection, to prevent reinfection.

#### Eating health

Diet can have a big impact on your dental health both good and bad. Sugary foods can cause tooth decay. Your teeth and gums also require nutrients to stay healthy. Choose a balanced diet and limit sugary snacks and fizzy drinks between meals. A balanced diet means eating foods from all five major food groups – grains, fruits and vegetables, lean protein and dairy foods.

Some essential vitamins and minerals for healthy teeth and gums include calcium, phosphorous, iron, vitamins A, B, C, D, E and K.

### Have regular dental check-ups

A dental check up is advisable every six months. Your dentist will take x-rays to check the condition of your teeth and catch any problems before they become serious. At your check-up you will also receive a scale and polish – the removal of plaque and tartar from the teeth. If any cavities are present, they will be filled.

### Stop smoking

Smoking increases your risk of gum disease, tooth loss and oral cancer. It can also discolour your teeth, increase the build-up of plaque and tartar on teeth and cause bad breath. A good number of reasons to quit today!



#### Resources

01. Denis, <http://www.denis.co.za>
02. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/dental/art-20047475?pg=2&ga=2.27886012.1483668150.1503474192-1224740332.1503474192>
03. <http://www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx>
04. <http://www.colgate.com/en/us/oc/>

### WHEN TO SEE THE DENTIST

In addition to regular check-ups every six months, you should also see the dentist if you:

- › crack or break a tooth
- › have a tooth knocked out
- › see or suspect a cavity
- › develop severe pain around a tooth or in your jaw, usually a tooth abscess
- › develop very red or bleeding gums, may be gingivitis or an abscess
- › suffer with persistent jaw pain, may be temporomandibular joint disorder



Fluoride is a natural mineral. Dental products that contain fluoride help to strengthen tooth enamel and stop cavities in their tracks.

Did you know?  
Humans have  
20 milk teeth and  
32 permanent  
teeth.

### KNOW YOUR ORAL HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

- › A **dentist** provides primary oral health care for the whole family.
- › A **dental assistant** assists the dentist in his or her duties.
- › An **oral hygienist** works with the dentist, deep cleans teeth and provides information on how to correctly clean teeth and the right diet for good oral health.
- › A **dental therapist** provides the same service as the oral hygienist but he or she can also fill or extract teeth.
- › An **orthodontist** is a dental specialist who specialises in tooth alignment. He or she will prescribe orthodontic appliances to straighten or move teeth to correct their alignment and/or correct the patient's bite.
- › A **dental technician** works in a laboratory to make crowns, dentures, plates etc that have been prescribed by a dentist or orthodontist.

## Q & A COMMON DENTAL ISSUES

**Q: My boyfriend has bad breath. What should he do?**

*A: Go to a dentist and have his mouth assessed, as systemic disease can result in a different odour in the mouth.*

**Q: My child wakes up with bad breath. Why?**

*A: It is important that your child brushes his teeth before he goes to sleep. Go to a dentist and have his mouth assessed.*

**Q: My gums are bleeding but I'm not sure why.**

*A: This is caused by many factors such as hormonal changes and incorrect brushing techniques. See your dentist for a check-up.*

**Q: My baby has rotten teeth. What's gone wrong?**

*A: This is often caused by babies sleeping with the bottle in the mouth. Avoid this habit and take the child to the dentist to fix the rotten teeth. Taking care of milk (baby) teeth allows the permanent teeth to grow better.*

**Q: Why is sugar bad for your teeth?**

*A: The bacteria in the mouth thrive on sugar. As the bacteria grow, fed by sugar, they create acid in your mouth that erodes the enamel on your tooth. This is the starting point for cavities which can lead to rotting teeth.*

Source: Denis



## PARENT CORNER

Here are some tips and guidelines for your child's oral health:

- › Start brushing your baby's teeth as soon as the first tooth appears. Use a suitable soft baby toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. See your dentist within three months of the first tooth appearing and before your child's first birthday.
- › Once there are two teeth next to one another, floss between the teeth.
- › Never let your baby or toddler go to sleep sucking a bottle that contains sugary liquid as this can lead to severe tooth decay.
- › Brush your baby's teeth twice daily.
- › Teach your child the right way to brush his or her teeth. Use a timer to ensure the child brushes for the full two minutes. Supervise teeth brushing until your child is at least seven years old.
- › Take your child to the dentist for regular check-ups, not only to prevent problems but also to get the child used to seeing the dentist without fear.
- › Make sure your child eats a healthy, balanced diet and avoid sugary drinks and snacks between meals.
- › Ask your dentist about fissure sealants for your child's teeth. This is a coating applied to the chewing surface of teeth that helps to prevent bacteria and food from getting into small ridges in the teeth.