

Health Promotion in Motion

Protect Your Smile. Protect Your Health.

Good oral hygiene may protect more than your smile. For example, research shows that gum disease (periodontal disease) may be linked to other health problems. When gum disease bacteria travel to other parts of the body, they may cause health problems such as:

- Heart disease
- Uncontrolled diabetes
- Stroke
- Pregnancy problems (preterm birth)



Gum Disease

Periodontal disease is an infection in the gums. It begins when plaque builds up along and under the gum line. Sometimes gum disease makes your gums tender and more likely to bleed. If not treated, gum disease can ruin the bones, gums, and other tissues that support your teeth. Over time, teeth may have to be removed.

You can have gum disease and not be aware of it. The only way to know if you have gum disease is to get a periodontal exam from a dental professional. This is especially important if you:

- Have heart disease or diabetes.
- Are thinking of becoming pregnant.
- Notice any gum disease symptoms such as tender, receding, or bleeding gums.
- Have a sore or irritation in your mouth that does not get better within two weeks.
- Have a family or household member with periodontal disease. **Research shows gum disease can be passed through intimate contact such as kissing.**

Dry Mouth

When you don't have enough saliva to keep your mouth wet, it's hard to eat, swallow, taste, and speak — and can cause tooth decay and mouth infections.

Many common medicines can cause dry mouth. If you have dry mouth:

- Sip water or sugarless drinks.
- Avoid drinks with caffeine.
- Chew sugarless gum sweetened with **xylitol**.
- Ask your dentist or doctor for more ideas.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Don't smoke.
- Suck sugarless hard candy.

Oral Cancer

Pain is not usually an early symptom of oral cancer. **A dental check-up is a good time for your dentist to look for signs of oral cancer. Even if you have lost all your natural teeth, you should still see your dentist for regular oral cancer exams.** Oral cancer treatment works best before the disease spreads. To lower your risk:

- Do not use tobacco products – cigarettes, chewing tobacco, snuff, pipes, cigars.
- If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation.
- Use lip balm with sunscreen.

How to Maintain Good Oral Health

- **Visit your dentist regularly.**
 - Professional tooth cleaning is important.
 - Check-ups can catch oral health problems early, so that treatments can begin to prevent further damage, or in some cases, reverse the problem.
- **Fluoride protects your teeth at all ages.** Drink fluoridated water and use a fluoride toothpaste. Use a fluoride gel or mouth rinse if your dentist recommends one.
- **Brush twice a day. Floss daily.**
 - Use a soft-bristle brush to gently brush your teeth on all sides.
 - Take **two minutes** to brush carefully and gently along the gum line. Use small circular motions and short back-and-forth strokes.
 - Bacteria live on your toothbrush. So, **change it every 8 weeks.**
 - Lightly brush your tongue. Bacteria live there, too!
 - Clean around each tooth with dental floss every day to take off plaque and food that a toothbrush can't reach. Ask your dentist to show you the right way to floss.
- **Avoid tobacco.**
 - Smokers have **four times** the risk of gum disease as non-smokers.
 - Tobacco use (cigarette, pipes, or smokeless [spit] tobacco) increases your risk for gum disease, oral and throat cancers, and oral fungal infections.
 - Spit tobacco made with sugar increases the risk of tooth decay.
- **Limit alcohol.** Heavy alcohol use is a risk factor for oral and throat cancers. When used alone, alcohol and tobacco are risk factors for oral cancers, but when used together the harmful effects are even greater.
- **Diabetic patients should work to control their diabetes.** Uncontrolled diabetes increases the risk for gum disease. And, uncontrolled gum disease increases the complications of diabetes.
- **Eat wisely.**
 - Avoid snacks full of sugars and starches.
 - Eat fiber-rich fruits and vegetables to stimulate salivary flow to help keep teeth and gums healthy.
 - Limit sweets to mealtimes. Cut down on sweets during the day.
 - Between meals, drink water.



Sip All Day, Get Decay.

- The sugar in soda feeds the bacteria in your mouth forming acid that causes decay. Diet soda also has acid.
- Each acid attack lasts 20 minutes.
- The acid attack starts over again with every sip.
- Ongoing acid attacks weaken your tooth enamel causing cavities.



Teeth are meant to last a lifetime. Protect your smile – and your health!