



Oral Health Tips

From Teeth to Toes: How Oral Health Affects your Overall Health

The bacteria that live in your mouth are usually found in dental plaque that forms on your teeth and between your teeth and gums. If left unchecked these bacteria can cause tooth decay and periodontal disease. Periodontal disease (gum disease) is an infection of the gums that can actually damage bone and supporting tissues in and around the mouth. Some research suggests that bacteria can spread to other parts of the body, potentially causing other health problems.

Medical Health Connections

- Oral bacteria can cause serious oral health problems for diabetics and for people with other medical conditions.
- Recent research suggests that oral bacteria may be associated with heart disease and stroke.
- The bacteria that cause gum disease are believed by some health professionals to be a contributor to bacterial pneumonia. People who might already be susceptible to pneumonia, like the elderly, those with asthma or those prone to respiratory infections, should be especially vigilant about maintaining oral health.

Your Mouth as a Mirror

Your mouth really is a mirror of your overall health. A dentist examining your mouth or face may detect signs of diseases like:

- Cancers of the throat, tongue or mouth
- Diabetes
- Anemia
- Eating disorders
- Autoimmune and immune deficiency disorders

Your dentist can also gauge the effects of harmful behavior, like tobacco use, and detect some vitamin deficiencies.

Total Wellness Requires Good Oral Health

Think of good dental care as a component of your overall health care — just like exercising, eating right and taking care of the rest of your body. Boost your overall health by cutting down on your risk of tooth decay, periodontal disease and oral cancer. Maintaining good oral health is easy, and important for your total wellness:

- Early detection of periodontal disease is critical – visit your dentist regularly.
- Brush and floss every day. Plaque is constantly forming on your teeth; this is unavoidable. However, proper regular cleaning removes most plaque, significantly reducing your chances of developing periodontal disease.
- Check with your dentist to ensure you are receiving the right amount of fluoride and dental sealants, if needed.
- If you use tobacco products, quit.
- Tell your dentist about your medical conditions and medications, because they may affect your oral health.
- Finally, eat an orally healthy and nutritionally balanced diet.

Sources: American Dental Association: www.ada.org;
U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health:
www.surgeongeneral.gov