

Oral Hygiene Q & A

When we think about staying healthy, oral health isn't usually something that comes to mind first. Yet, good oral health habits should be a part of your daily life. Your mouth, teeth and gums not only affect your smile, but your ability to talk, taste, chew and swallow. Let's look at some of the top questions on oral health.

What kind of toothbrush is best?

With so many shapes and sizes of toothbrushes it can be hard to know what type to choose. If you are shopping for a manual toothbrush, find one whose size and shape will fit comfortably in your hand and your mouth. You want to find one that will allow you to reach all of your teeth easily. A toothbrush with soft bristles is best for plaque removal.

Some people may find a powered toothbrush more effective. Similar to a manual toothbrush, the most important factor is one that fits comfortably in your mouth.

Should I brush or floss first?

According to the American Dental Association, it does not matter if you brush or floss first. It's more important that you do both and do a thorough job.

What causes bad breath?

Bad breath, or halitosis, can be embarrassing. Bad breath can be caused by a number of things. The foods you eat, such as onions and garlic, or the use of tobacco products can cause bad breath. Another common cause is dry mouth. Bad breath can also be a sign of a medical disorder.

Where can I find low-cost dental care?

Dental care can be expensive if you don't have dental insurance. Many states offer dental assistance programs. You can contact your state dental society to see if there are any in your area.

Another option for lower cost dental care is to go to a local dental school clinic for your dental needs. Often times these clinics offer low-cost services with reduced or partial payment needed.

QuickTakes

Oral diseases affect many Americans every year. Tooth decay and gum disease are painful conditions that may result in tooth loss, and according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, oral cancers are the cause of about 7,000 deaths a year. Most oral diseases can be prevented with proper care. The American Dental Association (ADA) recommends the following for good oral hygiene:



- Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between teeth daily with floss or some type of interdental cleaner.
- Eat a well balanced diet and limit snacking.
- Visit your dentist regularly for professional cleanings and oral exams.

What are the benefits of using mouthwash?

Antibacterial mouthwashes can help reduce the amount of plaque-causing bacteria in the mouth. This can help in preventing tooth decay and gum disease. Fluoride mouth rinses may also provide additional benefits in the fight against tooth decay.

Mouthwashes may also have ingredients in them to help fight bad breath. Astringent salts and odor neutralizers are common ingredients that are found in mouthwash. Your dentist can help you determine if you need to use a mouthwash and what kind may be best for you.



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How often should dental x-rays be taken?

Dental x-rays are taken to help your dentist discover tooth decay, infections and signs of gum disease. The frequency of your dental x-rays will depend on your individual health and medical history. If it is your first visit to the dentist, he or she will probably recommend taking x-rays.

In general, for adults who have no tooth decay or are not at high risk, the American Dental Association recommends x-rays every 24-36 months. For people with a history of tooth decay or at high risk for tooth decay, x-rays should be taken every 6-18 months.

How do I choose a tooth whitening product?

The first step is to talk to your dentist about tooth whitening. He or she can tell you what will be most effective for you. In-office procedures are those that a dentist will do for you in his or her office. A bleaching agent is applied to the teeth and then a special light is applied to enhance the effects. One treatment usually takes about 30 minutes to an hour and it may take more than one application to reach the desired whiteness.

There are a number of at-home options for tooth whitening as well. Some you need to purchase through your dentist while others you can buy over-the-counter. Bleaching solutions actually bleach your tooth's enamel and they come in different concentrations and are applied for different lengths of time. Whitening toothpastes are also available. All toothpastes can help to whiten teeth by removing surface stains. Whitening toothpastes have additional polishing agents to provide more whitening.

What are wisdom teeth, and why do they so often need to be pulled?

Wisdom teeth are the last teeth in your mouth to erupt. Often times, they cause problems as they develop. When the jaw is not big enough to accommodate the growth of wisdom teeth, they can become impacted, or unable to come up, or are misaligned. Impacted wisdom teeth will usually need to be removed. Talk to your dentist about your wisdom teeth. If they need to be removed, your dentist may refer you to an oral surgeon.

What is fluoride and why is it in my water?

Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral found in water and soil. Back in the early 1940s, it was discovered that people whose drinking water was higher in fluoride had lower levels of tooth decay. Studies show that fluoride can prevent and even reverse tooth decay. Most communities in the United States began adding fluoride to their drinking water, which has successfully reduced the rate of tooth disease.

My teeth are sensitive, what does this mean?

Do your teeth hurt when you eat something very cold or very hot? Does brushing and flossing cause you discomfort? Sensitive teeth can be caused by a number of things. Cracked teeth, tooth decay, worn enamel and gum disease can all cause sensitive teeth.

If your teeth are sensitive, you should visit your dentist. Depending on the cause, your dentist can recommend things that may help. Special toothpastes may help at home, and your dentist may have treatments that can be done in the office to help.

Wilted Spinach Salad

Makes: 3 - 4 servings | 30 minutes

A classic wilted spinach salad is made with bacon drippings—clearly not a part of anyone's healthy diet. For our version, a hot mixture of orange marmalade, balsamic vinegar and seasonings is poured over the baby spinach leaves. It's remarkably good!

Ingredients:

- 2 large navel oranges
- 10 oz fresh baby spinach leaves (stemmed, washed and dried)
- 1 small red onion, chopped
- 2 tbs snipped fresh chives or sliced green onions
- 3 tbs orange marmalade
- 2 tbs balsamic vinegar
- 2 tsp olive oil
- ¼ tsp dried thyme
- ¼ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tbs chopped toasted pecans, optional



Preparation:

1. Remove orange peel (including white pith) with a serrated knife. Working over a bowl to catch the juice, cut the orange segments from the membranes. Squeeze any juice from the membranes into the bowl as well.
2. Combine spinach, orange segments and chives or green onions in a salad bowl.
3. In a small saucepan, combine marmalade, vinegar, oil, thyme, salt and pepper. Heat over medium-low heat until the mixture begins to simmer. Pour over spinach and toss quickly. Sprinkle with pecans, if using. Serve immediately.

Nutritional Information (per serving):

118 Calories; 2.6g Fat; 0.4g Saturated Fat; 3g Protein; 23g Carbohydrates; 4g Fiber; 319mg sodium