

A Healthier You

Keeping Your Smile for a Lifetime



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Teeth are meant to last a lifetime. By taking good care of your teeth and gums, you can protect them for many years.

No matter how old you are, you need to take care of your teeth and mouth. When your mouth is healthy, you can eat the foods you need for good nutrition. You will also feel better about smiling, talking, and laughing.

Preventing Tooth Decay

Teeth are covered in a hard, outer coating called enamel. Every day, a thin film of bacteria builds up on your teeth. Over time, the bacteria can cause holes in the enamel. These holes are called cavities. Brushing and flossing your teeth can protect you from decay, but once a cavity happens, a dentist has to fix it.

You can protect your teeth from decay by using fluoride toothpaste. In addition, your dentist or dental hygienist may give you a fluoride treatment during an office visit. Or, the dentist may tell you to use a fluoride gel or mouth rinse at home.



Protecting Yourself from Gum Diseases

Gum disease begins when plaque builds up along and under the gum line. This plaque causes infections that hurt the gum and bone that hold teeth in place. Sometimes gum disease makes your gums tender and more likely to bleed. This problem, called gingivitis, can often be fixed by daily brushing and flossing.

Other gum diseases need to be treated by a dentist. If not treated, these infections can ruin the bones, gums, and other tissues that support your teeth. Over time, your teeth may have to be removed.

Oral Cancer

Approximately 35,000 Americans are diagnosed each year with oral cancer. This largely preventable type of cancer that affects the mouth and/or part of the throat. Because oral cancer can spread quickly, early detection is important. An oral cancer exam can identify early signs of this disease. The exam is quick and painless, and can be done during your regular dental check-up. Be sure to tell your dentist if you notice persistent changes in your mouth or throat, such as sores, swelling, or numbness, or if you have difficulty eating or swallowing.



Cleaning Your Teeth and Gums

Daily oral care is important. Here are some tips for a good dental routine:

- Pay attention to your teeth and gums at least twice a day
- Gently brush your teeth on all sides with a soft-bristle brush and fluoride toothpaste.
- Use small circular motions and short back-and-forth strokes.
- Take the time to brush carefully and gently along the gum line.
- Lightly brush your tongue to help keep your mouth clean.

In addition to brushing your teeth, you will want to use dental floss daily to clean between your teeth. Careful flossing will take off plaque and leftover food that a toothbrush can't reach. Be sure to rinse after you floss.

See your dentist if brushing or flossing causes your gums to bleed or hurts your mouth. If you have trouble flossing, a floss holder may help. Ask your dentist to show you the right way to floss.

Maintaining good oral health can help you keep your smile for a lifetime!



Additional Dental Tips

Other recommendations for good oral health can help keep you healthy in other ways, too!

- Regularly drink fluoridated water
- Eat a balanced diet and limit between meal snacks.
- Avoid sugars and starches when snacking and limit the number of snacks eaten throughout the day
- Limit alcohol and avoid tobacco.
- Replace your toothbrush every 3-4 months

Above all, visit your dentist regularly. Regular professional care is important even if you do not have natural teeth.

Simple steps and prevention is all it takes to keep a healthy smile and a healthy you!

Looking for further information? Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/oralhealth

