

Brush Up On Oral Health

Good oral health means more than having pretty teeth. It includes your teeth, gums, jawbone, and supporting tissues. Visit the dentist regularly. Checkups can detect early signs of oral health problems and can lead to treatments that will prevent further damage.

The health of your mouth can be a sign of your body's health. Mouth problems aren't just cavities, toothaches, and crooked or stained teeth. Many conditions—such as diabetes, HIV, cancer, and some eating disorders—can cause oral health problems.

To keep your mouth healthy:

- Drink fluoridated water and use a fluoride toothpaste. Fluoride's protection against tooth decay works at all ages.
- Thoroughly floss and brush your teeth. Doing so reduces dental plaque and can help prevent gingivitis, the mildest form of gum disease.
- Avoid tobacco. Tobacco use in any form increases the risk for gum disease, oral and throat cancers, and fungal infections.

Oral cancer often goes undetected until the late stages, so it's important to ask your dentist to check for signs of oral cancer during your regular checkup. Oral cancer often starts as a tiny white or red spot or sore anywhere in the mouth that becomes chronic. Other signs include a sore that bleeds easily or does not heal; a color change in the mouth; a lump, rough spot, or other change; or pain, tenderness, or numbness anywhere in the mouth or on the lips.

Here are ways to reduce your risk for oral cancer:

- Avoid tobacco and alcohol. Tobacco use in any form is the biggest risk factor for oral cancer. When alcohol and tobacco are used together, the risk for oral cancers is even greater.
- Eat a healthy diet. Avoid snacks full of sugars and starches. Getting the recommended five servings a day of fruits and vegetables can help prevent the development of lesions that may be cancerous.