

Brushing, Flossing, Rinsing

It takes about five minutes twice a day and the right tools to maintain or improve your oral health. Brushing, flossing and rinsing, as recommended by a dental hygienist, should be part of your daily regimen to prevent oral infections such as tooth caries (decay) and periodontal (gum) disease.

ABOUT TOOTH CARIES (DECAY)

Dental caries is a chronic infectious disease caused by acid-forming bacteria that dissolve the surfaces of the teeth, creating holes. The main causes of decay are a diet high in sugar and the bacteria found in dental plaque (white, sticky substance) that accumulates on teeth, especially around the gum line.

Signs and symptoms

- The earliest signs of decay are chalky white spots on the teeth.
- As the condition progresses, the spots change to brown or black, eventually turning into a cavity or hole in the tooth.
- As decay progresses further into the tooth, it can cause pain and the tooth could die.
- The pain may worsen with exposure to heat, cold, sweet or sour food and drink.

Left untreated, this can lead to infection and possibly tooth loss. Before the cavity forms, the process is reversible, but once a cavity forms, the tooth damage is permanent.

PERIODONTAL (GUM) DISEASE

Periodontal disease is contagious. It is a chronic bacterial infection that affects the gum tissue, jaw bone and attachment fibers that support the teeth and hold them in place. Gum disease starts slowly without any pain and may not be apparent until there are serious side effects.

Over time, a buildup of plaque bacteria on teeth and gums eventually harden into mineralized deposits called calculus or tartar. Left untreated, the bacteria can cause inflammation of the gums (gingivitis), penetrate the gum line and finally spread into the underlying bone (periodontitis). Eventually, gum disease can result in abscesses or the complete destruction of the tooth's supporting tissues and, ultimately, tooth loss.

Symptoms

- Red, swollen or tender gums that bleed when brushing or flossing
- Receding gums
- Metallic taste
- Tooth sensitivity for no apparent reason
- Loose or shifting teeth

- Abscesses and pus around gums and teeth
- Chronic bad breath (halitosis)

GOOD REASONS TO BRUSH AND FLOSS

Maintaining good oral hygiene will help to:

- Decrease the risk of tooth decay and gum disease by removing bacterial plaque before it hardens into tartar (calculus). Once tartar forms, it has to be removed (scaled) by a dental hygienist.
- Remove food debris.
- Prevent and control oral disease and infections.
- Improve oral and general health.
- Reduce/eliminate halitosis.
- Improve appearance and maintain healthy looking smiles.



BRUSHING TECHNIQUES

- Brush twice a day for two minutes (morning and before bed) using a soft toothbrush and fluoridated toothpaste.
- For children who are able to spit, use a pea-size amount of fluoridated toothpaste. (See Fact Sheet on "Oral Health for Children")
 - Basic manual brush technique:*
 - Place the brush on a 45-degree angle to the teeth at the gum line; flex gently and sweep or roll down from the gum line in a flicking motion.
 - Repeat five to 10 times in each place. Move the brush along in small steps in an organized manner.
 - Brush chewing surfaces in a circular or back and forth motion.
- Use a manual or power toothbrush. Used properly both perform well. A dental hygienist can recommend the right brush and technique.
- Replace toothbrush (or power brush head) every two to three months, or when bristles start to bend and after a cold or flu.
- Never share toothbrushes.

FLOSSING TECHNIQUES

- Floss at least once a day.
- Choose the floss based on personal preference – waxed, unwaxed, flavoured or plain. All work well.
- Flossing helps to remove the plaque that the toothbrush can't reach.
- Break off a piece of floss about 45 centimetres long.
- Wrap most of it around the middle finger; wrap it a couple of times around the middle finger of the other hand as an anchor.
- Using the index finger and thumb, grasp the floss so that there is about two to three centimetres of exposed floss.
- Keep the floss taut and gently, using a sawing motion, work the floss between two teeth. Wrap the floss around the side of the tooth in a "C" shape.
- Gently, scrap the plaque off the side of the tooth and below the gum line, being careful not to cut or pinch the gums. Repeat on the opposite tooth surface.
- Remove the floss from between the teeth using a sawing motion or by releasing the floss from the fingers and pulling it through. Proceed to the next tooth.
- Rinse thoroughly or brush after flossing to remove the loosened plaque and debris.



In addition...

- Brush or scrape the tongue daily. It can harbour harmful bacteria and odour.
- Dental hygienists can provide instruction on effective brushing and flossing techniques.
- For those who have difficulty with traditional flossing, a number of products can be used to clean between teeth, e.g., floss holder, floss threader, sulcus brush, proxabrush. Use a rubber-tipped stimulator to massage the gums.

- Check gums/mouth regularly and report any changes or signs of cavities or gum disease to a dental professional.

RINSING

Rinses range from plain water to products that are available over-the-counter and by prescription. Discuss various products with a dental hygienist.

- Rinsing does not replace daily brushing and flossing.
 - Certain rinses may help to promote oral hygiene, reduce oral discomfort, provide moisture to oral tissues or help with bad breath. Rinses are categorized as cosmetic, therapeutic or a combination of the two.
 - Some cosmetic rinses may temporarily mask halitosis by leaving a pleasant, refreshing taste. A number contain whitening agents that don't actually bleach teeth but might help to lighten stains.
 - Some rinses are available without alcohol, but many contain high concentrations of alcohol ranging from 18 to 26 per cent.
- Therapeutic rinses are designed to fight plaque, gum disease, tooth decay and other oral conditions and infections.
- Read the labels for proper use, research the products and seek advice from a dental hygienist.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR MAINTAINING GOOD ORAL HEALTH

- Visit a dental hygienist regularly.
- Eat a nutritious, well-balanced diet – follow Canada's Food Guide.
- Reduce sugar consumption and limit intake of acidic food/beverages.
- Practise healthy snacking; eat apples, raw vegetables, hard cheese, nuts and seeds, popcorn, hard-boiled eggs and drink water between meals.
- Don't smoke or use smokeless tobacco.

As professional health-care providers, dental hygienists are primarily concerned with promoting good oral health. Dental hygiene is among the largest of the regulated health-care professions in the province. In Ontario all dental hygienists are registered with the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario, which regulates the profession to ensure the public receives safe and ongoing comprehensive oral care.

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