

# Dental Care

*“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.” Psalm 33:6*

Dental care is simply the tasks required to keep your teeth healthy. It includes brushing and flossing teeth on a regular basis, going to the dentist for routine check ups and cleanings, and eating a diet that promotes healthy teeth and gums. The belief of modern dental care is that teeth should last for a **lifetime**.

There are so many reasons for taking care of your teeth. First of all, they greatly affect the way a person looks. Clean teeth give a good first impression to everyone you meet. They tell the world that you care about your health and about how people see you. However, there are serious health issues to consider. Basic dental care will prevent tooth decay and gum disease, and the possible loss of teeth. It makes your visits to the dentist and dental hygienist shorter and more enjoyable. It saves money by reducing the need for fillings and dental procedures. Your breath will be fresher, and your overall health will actually be better.

Acid may eat a hole, or cavity, into a tooth when teeth are not cleaned often or well enough. The deeper the hole, the more difficult it is to treat the cavity. A cavity can take months or years to develop. Once it reaches the pulp, or center, of the tooth, the tooth will die. Simple cavities can be fixed with a filling. Fillings can be made from several materials, including metals, resin, and porcelain. When a cavity is severe, a crown or root canal may be the only way to save the tooth.

Plaque is a sticky but clear material regularly produced by the mouth. It contains bacteria and other harmful substances. It can be kept under control with regular brushing, flossing, and dental cleanings. Damage to teeth, gums, and eventually to bones will occur if plaque is not kept under control.

In addition to good hygiene, fluoride is another weapon against tooth decay. It is a chemical that is commonly added to tooth pastes and water supplies. It not only makes teeth stronger and able to resist decay, it helps control bacteria in the mouth. It is also available by prescription for those who drink well water. Sealants are now commonly used to protect children’s teeth and prevent cavities. The dentist usually applies this to permanent molars. To prevent cavities and dental disease in children, avoid putting them to bed with a bottle, and don’t give them sugary drinks to suck on. Some people view cavities in young children as harmless, because they are “only baby teeth.” However, cavities will cause pain and make food difficult to chew.

Certain foods, such as sugary cookies and soft drinks, and less obvious ones like bread and breakfast cereal, combine with bacteria in the mouth and attack the teeth and gums. Brush at least twice a day, but no more than three times a day. Brushing too often or too briskly can cause the gums to recede, exposing nerves and giving cavities more places to occur. Brush for at least two minutes, as this is needed to get all the teeth clean. Develop a routine, such as all the outsides of the teeth, then all the insides, finishing with the tops. Use a soft toothbrush to avoid damaging the gums. Toothbrushes should be replaced every three months so they can continue to clean properly. An electric toothbrush

is a fine tool, but is not necessary unless your dentist recommends it for a special need you may have. Floss once a day, and use a fresh piece of floss in each space.

Tips for a healthy mouth:

- Use toothpaste with fluoride
- Drink fluoridated water, if possible
- Brush and floss daily
- Be aware that smokers/chewing tobacco users have four times more gum disease
- Heavy alcohol users increase their chances of mouth/throat cancer
- Increase fruits and vegetables, decrease sugary snacks
- Get regular dental check ups

Check out:

[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/dentalhealth.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/dentalhealth.html)

[www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/factsheets/brushup.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/factsheets/brushup.htm)