

Chapter 11

Oral Health

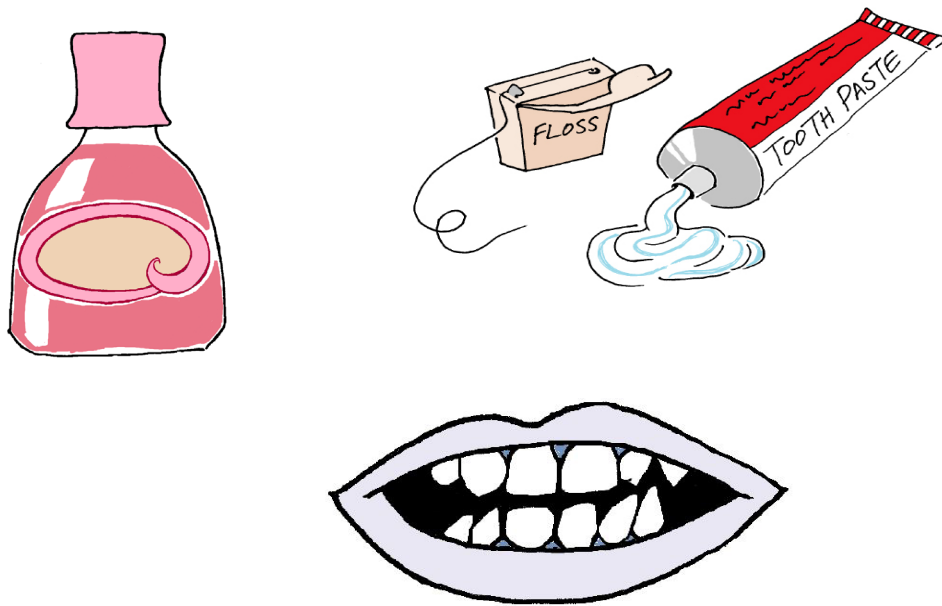


In this chapter, you can find information about:

1. The importance of oral health
2. Before: Planning for your dental appointment
3. During: The day of your appointment
4. After: Daily home care
5. What did I learn?

1. The Importance of Oral Health

Oral Health is taking care of your teeth and mouth which includes your teeth, gums, tongue, jaw, and the inside of your cheeks.



Why is Oral Health Important?

- A healthy mouth is very important for a healthy body and your overall well-being.
- Caring for your mouth can help prevent oral diseases like cavities and gum disease. These diseases can cause pain and tooth loss.
- Daily mouth care helps keep your breath smelling fresh and your teeth clean.
- A healthy mouth helps you feel confident.



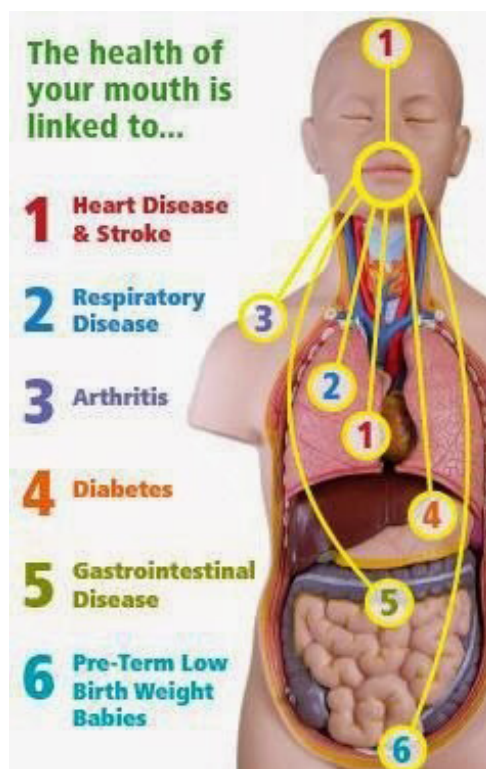
How Does Good Oral Health Help Your Entire Body?

Healthy gums and teeth help your whole body stay healthy and fight diseases.

Poor oral health can negatively affect your brain, heart, and lungs.

An unhealthy mouth can make illnesses such as arthritis and diabetes worse.

A healthy mouth can help a person have a healthier pregnancy.



Tobacco Use

Tobacco products such as cigarettes, cigars, chew, e-cigarettes and vaping are harmful for your body. This is especially true for your teeth, gums, and mouth.



If you need help quitting, contact your health care provider or your state's tobacco quit-line or county public health department. There is also a national QUIT line 1-800-784-8669. They will give you resources to help you quit using tobacco.

2. Before: Planning for Your Dental Appointment

- Your health insurance provider can help you find a dentist that is covered under your plan. You can also ask a friend, a support person, or family member if they know of a dentist that might be a good fit for you.
- Have your records transferred from your previous dental office.
- Ask if you need to pay what you owe the same day as your appointment. Some offices will set up payment plans.
- When you make an appointment, the receptionist may ask you questions like:
 - a. When was the last time you saw a dentist?
 - b. When was the last time you had your teeth cleaned?
 - c. Have any of your teeth been bothering you?
 - d. How often do you brush or floss?

Requesting Accommodations

Some accommodations you may need to consider requesting:

_____ Lighting adjustments - lights dimmed or sunglasses to wear

_____ Large print materials

_____ Interpreters

_____ Extra time

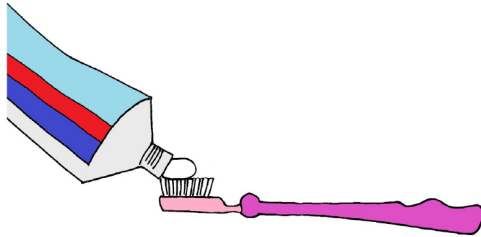
_____ Wheelchair accessible - do you usually need to be transferred to a exam chair or do you stay in your wheelchair?

_____ Ask the dental hygienist and dentist to explain what they are going to do before they do it.

3. During: The Day of Your Appointment

Preparing for Your Appointment

Being prepared for your appointment can help it go smoothly and quickly. Here are some things you may want to do for your appointment.



- Brush and floss your teeth.
- Wear comfortable clothes.
- Bring an item with you that helps you feel comfortable and relaxed. For example, headphones to block distracting noises or you can listen to your favorite music or soothing sounds.
- Arrive 15 minutes before your appointment, or sooner if the office asks.
- Remember your paperwork like dental history, photo identification, list of medications, completed forms, and insurance information.
- Call ahead to make sure your appointment is on time to reduce waiting time.

Other Tips



- Arrange your transportation in advance.
- Schedule a short appointment to meet your dentist's office staff to become familiar with them and the clinic.
- Request the same dentist and dental hygienist each time.
- Rehearse your dental appointment at home with a support person or friend.

At the Dentist's Office

Every dentist's office is different. Some of the staff you may meet include:

Receptionist

A receptionist is the first person you will see when you arrive for your appointment.

They will greet you and help you with:

- Checking in.
- Making sure all your paperwork is completed.
- Showing you where to sit until your name is called to go back to the exam room.
- Scheduling your next appointment after you have seen the dentist.
- Taking a payment, helping you understand what your insurance will cover, or connecting you with the office staff who does billing.



Dental Hygienist

A dental hygienist can help you learn how to take care of your teeth.

They examine your mouth for signs of damage and disease.

They will also examine your head and neck for disease or medical problems.

The dental hygienist may:

- Review your current and past medical and dental history.
- Ask about your diet and how you care for your teeth.
- Do an initial exam of your mouth, head, and neck.
- Take x-rays of your mouth.
- Clean and polish your teeth.
- Provide a fluoride treatment that strengthens your teeth and protects them against cavities.
- Apply a thin layer of plastic, called sealants, to the tops of your teeth. This helps prevent cavities.
- Help you



Dentist



A dentist is a doctor who specializes in oral health.

A dentist can identify and treat dental problems. The dentist will have an assistant to help them during the exam.

After your teeth are cleaned the dentist may:

- Look at your x-rays and talk to you about any issues they see.
- Check your mouth for any oral health problems.
- Examine your teeth and let you know if you have any cavities or gum disease.
- Discuss a plan for treating any mouth problems.

4. After: Daily Home Care

Steps to Brushing Your Teeth



Step 1: Put a small pea sized amount of toothpaste with fluoride on your toothbrush.

Step 2: In a circle motion, brush the tops of your back teeth.

Step 3: Brush the outsides of all your teeth using circle motions. Brush the insides of all your teeth. Use tip of the toothbrush for the backside of your front teeth. Make sure you also brush your gums.

Step 4: Brush your tongue. Lots of germs live on your tongue.

Step 5: Spit into the sink.

Step 6: Rinse off your toothbrush and put it away. Do not let your toothbrush bristles touch other toothbrushes.

Note: Don't rinse your mouth out with water when you are done brushing. Leaving the tooth paste in your mouth will continue to make your teeth stronger and fight against cavities.

It is important to brush your teeth for 2 minutes.

Be sure and change your toothbrush every 3 months or after an illness.



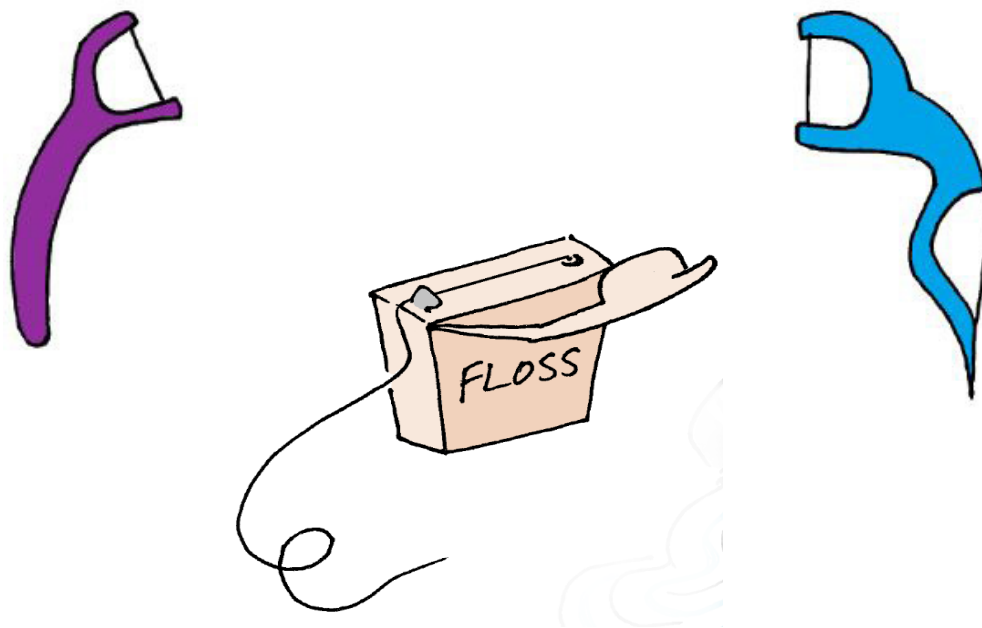
Steps to Flossing Your Teeth

Flossing your teeth daily is an important part of oral hygiene.

It helps to get the food and germs out from between your teeth.

There are different tools you can use to floss your teeth. Your dentist will help you find a way that works best for you.

Your dentist or dental hygienist may suggest you use floss that looks like one of these:



You may want to ask the dentist or dental hygienist about:



If you need a modified toothbrush with a larger handle or a toothbrush with a strap to wrap around your wrist.

If you would benefit from an electric toothbrush.

If you need non-foaming toothpaste or a modified type of toothpaste or a toothpaste squeezer.

If you need anything for dry mouth relief like a spray, lozenges, or special toothpaste.

What Causes Cavities and Gum Disease and How to Prevent Them

What are cavities?

A cavity is a hole in the tooth caused by germs in your mouth. Cavities can cause pain in your mouth and toothaches.

Germs use the sugar and starches in the food you eat to make acid. Over time, the acid breaks down the outside layer of the tooth and creates a hole.

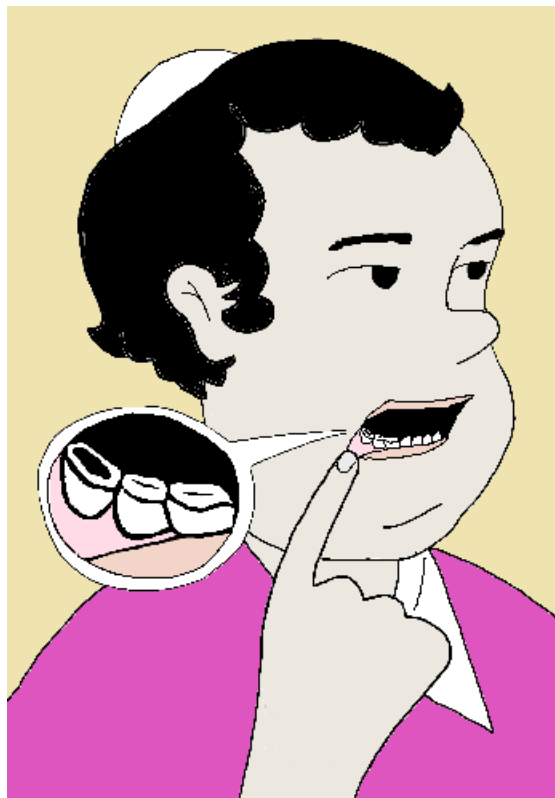
These holes can grow bigger and deeper over time if they are not treated by a dentist.

Untreated cavities can cause pain and make it difficult to eat, talk, and smile.

A cavity can be fixed by a dentist with special material that is called a "filling".

Here are some things that can cause cavities or gum disease:

- Eating sugary foods between meals
- Some medications and health conditions can cause teeth to become soft which may make it easier to develop cavities or gum disease
- Leaving food and germs on teeth
- Poorly controlled diabetes
- Tobacco use



What is gum disease?

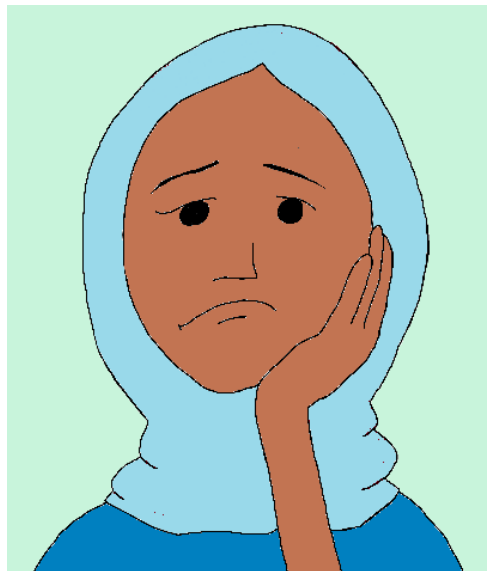
Gum disease is an infection that affects the gums and bones that support the teeth.

Most of the time, there are no symptoms with the early stages of gum disease.

The gums might bleed when you brush, but usually there is no pain.

As the gums begin to recede, there is usually sensitivity to hot and cold temperatures. When bone around the teeth is lost, the teeth will become loose.

Gum disease can lead to tooth loss.



How to prevent cavities and gum disease

- Use a fluoride product at home if recommended by your dentist or dental hygienist.
- Brush your teeth at least twice a day and floss daily.
- Save sugary foods for mealtime. In between meals, snack on foods that do not create acid like cheese, fresh fruits and vegetables, or nuts.
- Have regular dental checkups and cleanings.
- Always follow your dentist's or dental hygienist's instructions .
- Ask questions if you do not understand.
- If you have diabetes, follow your medical doctor's advice for managing it.

5. What Did I Learn?

I can take charge of my health care when I know:

- Why good oral health is important
- How my oral health affects my whole body
- What accommodations are best for me and how to ask for them
- How to care for my teeth and gums
- What causes cavities and gum disease and how to prevent them

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