

Oral Health

Did you know that your teeth start to form before you are born? The base of tooth material begins to form at 6 weeks of pregnancy. This is another reason why proper nutrition for pregnant women is so important. Good oral health plays a very significant role in a healthy body. With this in mind, it is very important that proper mouth and dental care begin at an early age, as soon as an infant is born. Breastfeeding your child plays a major role in tooth and jaw development. According to the World Health Organization, breast milk has antibacterial protective properties that can help to prevent tooth decay. In addition, studies show that children who are breastfed have straighter teeth.

Even prior to seeing “teeth” erupt from the gums; an infant’s mouth should be wiped clean every day with a clean, soft, damp cloth. As soon as you are able to see teeth, up until the age of three, a soft bristled brush should be used, with a smear of fluoride toothpaste, about the size of a grain of rice. After the age of three, fluoride toothpaste about the size of a pea should be used. Always encourage the child to spit the toothpaste out when finished. Children should be assisted when brushing their teeth until they can do a good job on their own. The teeth and tongue should be brushed at least twice per day, especially after meals and before bed. Remember to floss every day. If you don’t floss, you are not completely cleaning your teeth.

All children should have at least one visit to the dentist by their first birthday. The dentist is the only person who has the training to examine for mouth and dental issues. They can tell if teeth are crooked or crowded and can treat any problems if they occur. Everybody should have a regular check-up every six months to watch for things such as tooth decay, cavities, gum disease or oral cancers.

As children get older it becomes more difficult to monitor their dental health habits. Teach children the importance of keeping their teeth clean at an early age so that these habits continue throughout their lifetime. Healthy foods, full of nutrients and minerals, are very important in preventing tooth decay and gum disease. Sugar is one of the main causes of dental problems, so limiting the amount of sugary food and beverages that you ingest is very important. Satisfy thirst with water, not sugary drinks such as soda pop, fruit punches and cocktails. Snack on fruits or vegetables: your breath, your smile and your entire body will thank you for it!

Once children reach the teenage years, most of their teeth are their permanent teeth. Extra care is needed to make sure these teeth stay healthy and protected. If children are involved in contact sports, ensure they use a proper mouth guard to prevent their teeth from injury. If your child requires braces, talk to your dental health care provider to get the proper advice on how to properly care for them.

Continuing good mouth and tooth care throughout your lifetime can help avoid many health problems. According to the Canadian Dental Association (CDA), research indicates there is a connection between mouth disease and many other health concerns such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, respiratory illness and also premature and low birth weight babies. Mouth infection or disease can not only lead to tooth loss but also pain or discomfort that can have a serious effect on the way you speak, eat, and smile. As a result, an unhealthy mouth can affect how you feel about yourself and how you interact with others too.

Tooth decay and gum disease are the main reasons why people lose their teeth. Check your mouth regularly and always follow up with your dentist if you have sores that don’t heal numbness or tingling in your mouth, or any lumps, bumps or discoloration around your tongue, gums, inside of your cheeks or on the roof of your mouth. If something doesn’t feel right, remember to always ask your doctor. For example, certain medications may have side effects that might dry out your mouth or damage your teeth.

Smoking is bad for your health at any age. Smoking can cause oral cancer, heart disease as well as many other cancers, not to mention it will stain your teeth and ruin your smile! All forms of tobacco are harmful, not just cigarettes. Cigars, chewing tobacco, snuff, and many other tobacco products can be extremely addictive and can

also cause cancer. For information on how to quit, contact your family doctor, your public health nurse, or the smokers helpline at 1-800-363-5864 or visit them at <http://www.smokershelp.net>

Good oral health is a significant part of your overall health. Doing your best to prevent dental health problems as well as early detection if they occur is key! April is National Oral Health Month. There is no time like the present to review your own health practices. As a part of a healthy lifestyle, you should follow the Canadian Dental Associations (CDA) 5 easy steps to good oral health:

- See your dentist regularly
- Keep your mouth clean
- Eat healthy foods
- Check your mouth regularly
- Avoid tobacco products

Following these practices will put a healthy and happy smile on your face and body!

For more information, please contact your dentist or visit the Canadian Dental Association website at <https://www.cda-adc.ca>.

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