

# Dental Health

What You Need To Know



## Permafold® Topics

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## Dental Care

### 1. Take Care of Your Teeth & Gums

Brush your teeth twice a day.  
Brush more often, if you need to.

#### Brush Your Teeth

- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush and a toothpaste with fluoride. If you have sensitive teeth, use a toothpaste made for this. Use a “tartar control” toothpaste if you’re prone to tartar buildup.
- Choose products with the American Dental Association (ADA) Seal of Approval on the label. Use a toothbrush that fits your mouth.
- Brush with a gentle, not a harsh, touch. Do a thorough job. Brush in small circles across all of the surfaces of both the upper and lower teeth. Brush the outer, the inner, and chewing surfaces, and the surfaces between the teeth.
- Brush your gums gently. Keep the brush perpendicular to your teeth and brush in small circles.
- Gently brush your tongue which can trap germs.
- A child younger than 7 years old and some handicapped persons may need help to do a thorough job. A mechanical toothbrush may be helpful.
- Use a new toothbrush every 3 to 4 months. Do this more often if the bristles are bent or frayed. Change it after having a throat or mouth infection, too.



Floss or use an interdental cleaner once a day. Doing this removes food particles and plaque from between your teeth and above and below the gum line areas that your toothbrush can’t reach.

#### Clean Between Your Teeth

- Use a piece of floss about 1½ feet long.
- To floss your upper teeth, hold the floss tightly between the thumb on one hand and index finger on the other. Using a gentle, sawing motion, bring the floss through the tight spaces between the teeth. Do not snap it against the gums.
- With the floss at the gum line, curve it into a C-shape against one tooth and gently scrape the side of the tooth with the floss. Repeat on each tooth. Use a fresh section of floss for each tooth.
- Repeat for your lower teeth, but hold the floss between both index fingers.
- If it is hard for you to use dental floss, use a dental floss holder sold in drugstores.
- After flossing, rinse your mouth with water, mouthwash, or an anti-microbial mouthrinse.



It is normal for gums to be tender and bleed for the first week. If this continues, see your dentist.

#### TIPS:

- **Don’t lay a baby down with a bottle left in the baby’s mouth, if the bottle contains juice, milk, pop, etc. Water is okay, though.**
- **Ask your dentist if you should use a fluoride mouth rinse, a prescribed toothpaste with fluoride, fluoride supplements, and/or a water-pik device.**

## 2. Dental Checkups

See your dentist every 6 months, at least every year, or as often as your dentist advises. Regular dental exams are important to your oral health

#### Reasons to get a dental checkup:

- To get your teeth cleaned and to remove plaque and tartar that buildup even after you brush and floss every day. Removing plaque and tartar helps prevent cavities, gum disease, and other problems.
- To check for cavities, gum disease, oral cancers, tooth grinding, bite problems, and other problems. When these are detected early, they are easier to treat.
- To address any areas of concern
- To find out from your dentist or dental hygienist what dental care and products best meet your needs

Also, an oral exam can help a dentist detect other health problems. These include diabetes, eating disorders, heart disease, osteoporosis, and a lack of vitamins.

## 3. Diet & Dental Health

- If your local water supply has fluoride, drink 6 to 10 cups of tap water every day. If not, make sure to use a fluoride toothpaste.
- Eat a well balanced diet. Limit between-meal snacks.
- Eat sticky, chewy, sugary foods, with (not between) meals. Finish a meal with foods that help buffer acid formation. Examples are cheese, meat, fish, nuts, and dill pickles.
- Avoid sugar-sweetened gum and beverages. Chew a sugar-free gum instead, especially one with the artificial sweetener xylitol.
- Don’t eat sweets, fruit, or starchy foods before bedtime. Saliva production slows down overnight. This allows cavity-causing bacteria to feed on food particles more easily and brushing your teeth doesn’t effectively prevent the problem.

## 4. Broken or Knocked-Out Tooth

#### Prevention

- Don’t chew on ice, pens, or pencils. Don’t use your teeth to pry things open, cut string, etc.
- If you smoke a pipe, don’t bite down on the stem.
- If you grind your teeth at night, ask your dentist if you should be fitted for a bite plate.
- If you play contact sports, such as football, wear a protective mouth guard.
- Always wear a seat belt when riding in a car.
- Don’t suck on lemons or chew aspirin or vitamin C tablets. The acid from these wears away tooth enamel.

#### Self-Care For a Broken Tooth

- **To reduce swelling, apply a cold compress to the area.**
- **Save any broken tooth fragments. Put them in a wet cloth or in milk. Take them to the dentist.**

#### For a Tooth That Has Been Knocked Out:

- **If you find the tooth, pick it up by the crown. Avoid contact with the root.**
- **Rinse off the rest of the tooth with clear water.**
- **If possible (and you’re alert), gently put the tooth back in it’s socket or hold it under your tongue. If you cannot do this, put the tooth in a glass of milk, a wet cloth, or cool salt water.**
- **If the gum is bleeding, hold a gauze pad or a clean tissue tightly in place over the wound.**

#### Reasons to Contact Your Dentist

If one or more teeth have been broken or knocked out, get to a dentist as soon as possible. If the dentist is not available, go to a hospital emergency department. Take the tooth with you. (Your dentist may be able to reinsert the tooth if you get treatment within hours. Follow up treatment is also needed.)

## Dental Health Problems

Dental health problems affect more than your teeth and mouth. Gum (periodontal) disease and other mouth infections may increase the risk for:

- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Pneumonia from bacteria



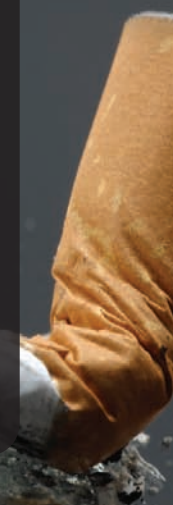
## 5. Tobacco Use & Dental Problems

Any form of tobacco can cause the following problems:

- Bad breath
- Stained teeth
- Increased risk of tooth decay
- Increased risk of gum disease. Tobacco use can also worsen gum disease.
- Early tooth loss

#### For help to stop using tobacco

- Talk to your doctor, dentist, or health care provider.
- Contact the following:
  - American Lung Association  
800.LUNG.USA (586.4872)  
www.lungusa.org/tobacco
  - National Network of Tobacco Cessation Quitlines  
800.QUIT.NOW (784.8669)  
www.smokefree.gov



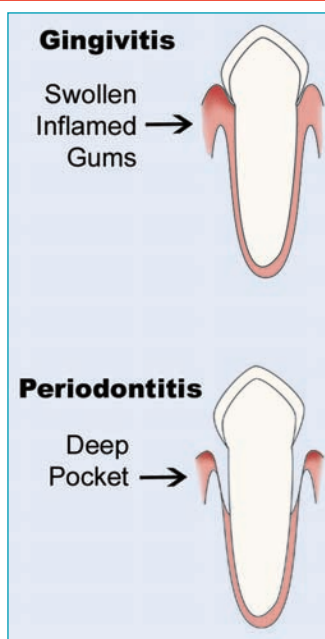


## 6. Gum (Periodontal) Disease

Gum disease should be treated by a periodontist or a dentist who is knowledgeable in this area of dentistry.

### Symptoms

- Swollen, red gums that bleed easily. This is called gingivitis.
- Pockets between gums and teeth, which expose teeth at the gum line. This is called periodontitis.
- Pus around the gums and teeth
- Permanent teeth that are loose or that separate from each other
- Bad breath and a foul taste in the mouth



### Tip:

**These things can irritate or destroy your gums: Trapped food particles; plaque build-up; crooked teeth or poorly fitting dentures; illness; certain medications; and tobacco**

### Treatment

Material called tartar (which is calcified plaque), can form even with normal brushing and flossing. The dentist or dental hygienist can remove tartar at regular checkups. If periodontitis is present, treatment depends on how severe the problem is.

### Self-Care

- Brush and floss your teeth daily. Have your dentist or hygienist show you the best way.
- Follow tips in “Diet & Dental Health,” topic 2.
- Include foods with good sources of vitamin A and vitamin C daily. Vitamin A is found in cantaloupe, broccoli, spinach, winter squash, liver, and dairy products fortified with vitamin A. Good vitamin C food sources include oranges, grapefruit, tomatoes, potatoes, green peppers, and broccoli.

### Reasons to Contact Your Dentist

- Your gums are swollen or bleed easily.
- Your roots are exposed at the gum line or your teeth are loose.
- Your teeth separate from each other.
- Pus forms around the gums and teeth.
- You have bad breath and/or a foul taste in your mouth, even after brushing and flossing your teeth.



## 7. Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Syndrome

This occurs when the muscles, joints, and ligaments of the jaw move out of alignment. Professional treatment may or may not be needed.

### Symptoms

- Earaches, headaches, pain in the jaw area that spreads to the face or the neck and shoulders
- Pain when opening and closing the mouth
- Ringing in the ears

### Causes

- Bruxism (grinding your teeth)
- Sleeping in a way that misaligns your jaw or creates tension in your neck
- Stress in your life, when it results in muscle tension in your neck and shoulders
- Incorrect or uneven bite
- Injury to the jaw

### Treatment

Many dentists specialize in this diagnosis and treatment. Early intervention may reduce the time needed for treatment and make surgery unnecessary.

Treatment includes:

- A bite plate to wear when you sleep or braces to correct the bite
- Anti-inflammatory medicines
- Muscle relaxants for a short period of time
- Physical therapy
- Surgery

### Self-Care

- Don't chew gum.
- Try not to open your jaw wide when you yawn or eat. For example, don't take big bites out of a triple-decker sandwich.
- Massage the jaw area many times a day. At first, do this with your mouth open. Then do this with your mouth closed.
- To help reduce muscle spasms that can cause pain, apply a warm washcloth to the jaw area.
- If stress is a factor, learn to manage it. Do deep breathing and relaxation exercises.

### Reasons to Contact Your Dentist

- You can't open your jaw completely.
- It hurts when you open your mouth wide.
- A “clicking” or “popping” sound occurs when you open your mouth and when you chew.
- You have a headache, earache, or pain in the jaw area that is also felt in the face, neck, or shoulders.

See your dentist or doctor right away if you are not able to open or close your mouth due to severe pain.

{**Note:** Your health plan may require that you see your doctor, not your dentist, for the diagnosis and treatment of TMJ.}



## 8. Toothaches

Symptoms are pain in the tooth itself and pain or ache in the gums or jaw.

### Causes

- A cavity or infection beneath or around the gum of a tooth
- Tooth abscess (an inflammation, and/or infection in the bone and/or the tooth's canals). This generally occurs in a tooth that has a deep cavity, a very deep filling, or one that has been injured.
- Receding gums which leads to inflammation
- Impacted teeth. Teeth may not fully erupt or can grow at odd angles.
- Temporary pain from corrective dental work
- An injury to a tooth
- A symptom of a sinus infection
- A symptom of angina or a heart attack

### Prevention

- Get regular dental checkups and cleanings.
- Ask your dentist about sealants (special bonded coatings that can help prevent cavities).
- Brush and floss your teeth daily.
- Use fluoridated water, toothpaste, rinse, and/or a fluoride supplement (if prescribed).
- Follow tips in “Diet & Dental Health,” topic 2.
- Let your dentist know if any of the following occur:
  - Hot, cold, or sweet foods cause tooth pain.
  - Brown spots or little holes on a tooth.
  - A change in your bite. This is the way your teeth fit together.
  - Loose teeth (in an adult).

### TIPS:

**Decay from a tooth should be removed before an abscess forms. Doing this can prevent the loss of a tooth. Cavities should be filled.**

### Self-Care

- Take an over-the-counter pain reliever. Don't place a crushed aspirin on the tooth, though. Aspirin burns the gums and destroys tooth enamel.
- Hold an ice pack on the jaw.
- Don't drink extremely hot or cold liquids.
- Chew sugarless gum, especially with the artificial sweetener xylitol. Don't chew gum with regular sugar (sucrose).
- Avoid sweets, soft drinks, and hot or spicy foods. (These can irritate cavities and increase pain.) It may be best not to eat at all until you see your dentist.
- Gargle with warm salt water every hour.
- For a cavity, pack it with a piece of sterile cotton soaked in oil of cloves (available at drug stores).
- See a dentist even if the pain subsides.

### Reasons to Contact Your Dentist

- You have persistent, throbbing pain in a tooth or tooth pain with a fever and/or general ill feeling.
- You have an earache and/or swelling of the glands on one side of your face or neck.
- Your gums bleed or are red or swollen.
- You have a toothache with foul breath even after you brush and floss your teeth.
- A toothache is constant even when you sleep.
- A toothache comes and goes or occurs only when you eat or drink.

### For More Information, Contact:

American Dental Association • [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)