

FOCUS

ON DENTAL HYGIENE



APRIL IS NATIONAL ORAL HEALTH MONTH

By Christine Brooke, RDH

5 Ways to the Healthier Smile we ALL want.

It's time to brush up on the importance of taking care of your dental health as we recognize National Oral Health Month in April. That's because a bright and healthy smile do a lot more than just make you look great. It supports your body's overall health, can reduce dental bills, alleviate unnecessary oral pain and help make sure your pearly whites are with you for life!

1. Visit your dental professional regularly

Who said a trip to the dentist's chair had to be a daunting experience?

Advancements in the dental industry have made regular visits to this infamous chair virtually pain free ... and your smile will love you for it! Your dentist and dental hygienist are your partners in maintaining a healthy smile. They can be instrumental in the early detection and treatment of problems in your mouth — even before your teeth are giving you any warning signs. Keep in mind, dental problems do not go away when left untreated and can potentially pose a serious health risk, as well as unnecessary pain. Who wants that? The cost of neglect is always higher than the cost of prevention.

2. Practice good oral hygiene

It's a daily deed that does not go unrewarded!

Good oral hygiene habits start with proper home care and can save you thousands in unnecessary dental bills. Let's start with your brush. Your teeth may be the hardest substance in your body, but it's especially important to use a soft-bristled toothbrush to minimize wear. And use it at least twice a day to keep your teeth clean, free of debris and the buildup of bacteria levels that can lead to disease and decay. Let's not forget your tongue. Sneaky bacteria that causes bad breath hides in the crevasses of your tongue and can wreak havoc on your social life. And, don't forget the floss! Only dental floss can reach below

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the gumline. Bacteria left behind in the pocket between the tooth and the gum tissue can lead to inflammation, buildup of deposits and increased risk of gum disease. If flossing is a challenge, alternatives such as irrigators or dental picks can provide great benefits.

3. Nourish your body from the inside, out

It's true! Total body health starts with your dental health.

There is plenty of evidence that supports the notion that a healthy diet supplemented with vitamins and combined with good oral health habits is your safest bet at achieving optimum overall health. There are a host of essential nutrients that have been shown to be beneficial in supporting healthy teeth and gums. Vitamins, along with minerals, are considered the building blocks of the body. And don't forget what your mom taught you: Eat your vegetables! Eating a variety of whole, natural foods can provide you with a rich source of these essential nutrients that promote good oral care.

4. Minimize snacking

At least the sugary, starchy and sticky foods we all love ... but that our smiles frown on because they promote decay.

By avoiding tempting treats like soft drinks, chips, crackers and candy, you can minimize the potential harm they have on the teeth. These types of foods literally assault the mouth and tend to get lodged and linger around the gumline and in between the teeth. And the "steer clear" list goes beyond junk foods. Other culprits include foods that are considered healthy, such as dried fruits, because of their high sugar content and how the bacteria in our mouth feed off these carbohydrates. A smart alternative when snacking is to choose fresh crunchy fruits and vegetables that have a natural cleansing ability such as carrots, apples and celery sticks.

5. Avoid smoking

It's about more than rotten breath and stained teeth.

In any form, tobacco increases a person's risk of developing oral cancer, including smokeless/chewing tobacco, cigarette, pipe and cigar smoking. In fact, smokers are six times more likely to develop oral cancer than non-smokers. Aside from all the obvious harmful effects of smoking (increased risk of oral cancer, heart disease, cholesterol levels, lung cancer, etc.), smoking dries the oral tissues of the mouth, reducing the availability of saliva and all the benefits saliva provides for the teeth and tissues. Smoking also increases carbon dioxide in the mouth and robs the tissues of oxygen. This delays healing in the tissues, stains the teeth and dental work and increases bad breath. Snuff out these risks by not lighting up in the first place!

Celebrate Oral Health Month in April by making a lasting commitment to brighten your smile, freshen your breath and promote the healthiest smile possible. You owe it to yourself!

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Christine has been a dental health consultant to dental offices nationwide for several years, educating dental professionals on topics such as alcohol-free home care, retailing in the dental practice and customizing hygiene programs for the cosmetic patient. She maintains professional affiliation and membership in the American Dental Hygiene Association, California Dental Hygiene Association and Idaho Dental Hygiene Association.