



Oral Health

Oral health is an important part of overall health and wellbeing and yet it is often taken for granted. Do you go for regular dental check-up? Do you floss regularly? Did you know that you should change your toothbrush every few months?

These are very important questions and if you have a proper oral health and hygiene routine in place then you should be answering yes to all of the above. If not, don't worry, read on to find out more about oral health and how you can improve your oral hygiene.

What is oral health?

The World Health Organization describes oral health as being free of chronic mouth and facial pain, oral and throat cancer, oral sores, birth defects such as cleft lip and palate, periodontal (gum) disease, tooth decay and tooth loss, and other diseases and disorders that affect the mouth and oral cavity.

Types of oral diseases

Your mouth can show signs of nutritional deficiencies or general infection and systemic diseases, those that affect the entire body, may first become apparent because of mouth lesions or other oral problems.

The most common oral diseases are dental cavities and periodontal (gum) disease. Severe gum disease may result in tooth loss, and this condition is found in 5-20% of middle-aged adults; the rate varies across geographical regions. Birth defects such as cleft lip and palate occur in around one per 500-700 of all births; the birth prevalence rate varies across ethnic groups and geographical areas. Oral cancer occurs on the lips (usually the lower lip), inside the mouth, salivary glands, tonsils on the back of the throat, oesophagus, and the tongue and soft tissues of the mouth.

Oral cancer is more common in men than women and usually affects those over the age of 40. 40-50% of people who are HIV-positive have oral fungal, bacterial or viral infections, which often occur early in the course of HIV infection.

Looking after your oral health

Decrease your risk of oral diseases and chronic diseases by following a healthy diet and limiting (or eliminating) tobacco products from your life. Eating less sugar and eating a well-balanced and nutritious diet will help prevent tooth decay and premature tooth loss. Make sure you eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables as these are protective against oral cancer.

Dental cavities can be prevented by maintaining a low level of fluoride in the oral cavity and lucky for you, fluoride is in most good toothpastes! Daily oral care should include brushing and flossing to prevent problems from developing. Regular visits to the dentist are important, but if you maintain a good oral care routine the cost of appointments shouldn't break the bank.

Simple steps to a confident smile

- Select a soft bristle toothbrush to prevent the risk of harming the gums and do not brush too hard as this can damage gums.
- Brush thoroughly at least twice a day, and especially before going to bed.
- Brush for at least two minutes at a time to ensure that all teeth are reached and food debris is removed.
- Replace toothbrushes at least every three months (If toothbrush bristles are flaring it is time to replace the toothbrush and a possible indication that you are brushing too hard.)
- Brush your tongue as this removes bacteria in the oral cavity.
- Floss at least once a day and follow the curves of the teeth when flossing.
- Use toothpaste or dental care products which contain fluoride.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Limit snacks.
- Visit your dentist regularly especially if experiencing pain or bad breath.
- Discuss the fluoride supplement requirements for children under the age of 12 years.