

Preventative care



Information

Now that you've had your dental examination and/or treatment, you will have been given advice about keeping your mouth clean. This information sheet gives you some simple and general advice which you can follow at home. It also provides information you can share with family members; this helps to ensure you limit the risk of dental disease developing in younger family members and help older family members keep their teeth and mouth in good health as they age.

If you've had complex treatment or have a high risk of developing dental disease, you're likely to be given additional and very specific advice. Dental health has been linked with various medical conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and lung problems. If you commit to preventative care and maintain good oral health, you will improve your overall wellbeing.

What is good oral health?

Good oral health means a mouth which is free from dental disease and that looks and smells healthy. This means you have clean teeth with no debris around them, gums that are pink and do not bleed when you brush them, and bad breath is not a regular problem.

Your tongue, palate, cheeks and the floor of your mouth are not sore, ulcerated or coated.

How do I practice good oral health?

It's useful to develop a routine for cleaning your mouth twice a day.

Starting with your teeth, you should take time to clean all tooth surfaces. You can use aids such as dental floss to clean between the teeth. While brushing your teeth, ensure you also gently brush your gums. There are various techniques you can use, so ask your dentist to show you methods best suited to you.

You should then scrape or gently brush your tongue. If you notice any sore or ulcerated areas in your mouth, you should seek professional advice as soon as possible.

What else can I do to help prevent dental disease?

In many ways, your diet is just as critical to your oral health. Even if you're meticulous in cleaning, you will still have bacteria in your mouth. Most of these bacteria thrive on sugar and produce acid as the sugar is broken down. Sugar is in many products and, if you're constantly snacking or drinking carbonated drinks, your risk of dental decay will increase significantly.

The saliva that your mouth produces helps to counteract this process so if you have a very dry mouth, this protective mechanism is lost. It's important to drink tap water on a regular basis so that your mouth is moist and you get the protective benefit of fluoride. A dry mouth can be a side effect of medications, particularly if you're on several different types. It's important your dentist is aware of all medications you take.

Which are the best products to use?

Your dentist may have made some suggestions for specific products however the most important thing is that you use a toothpaste which contains fluoride. There are also fluoride mouthwashes available. Ask your dentist if they think this is something which you would benefit from.

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How do I look after my gums?

If you haven't visited a dental clinic in a while, you may have noticed a build-up of hard deposits on your teeth. This is called calculus but commonly called tartar. Some people build up calculus very quickly. Once it forms, it's impossible to remove with a toothbrush. If it's not removed, it can affect the tissues that support the teeth and your teeth could start to loosen.

Smoking is particularly bad for gum health. The chemicals in cigarettes affect the gums and make them more susceptible to gum disease. Almost all smokers have gum disease of some sort. Even if you smoke less than ten cigarettes a day, you are still twice as likely to develop gum disease, compared to someone who doesn't smoke.

Why is smoking so bad for oral health?

If you smoke, you are up to six times more likely to develop not only gum disease but also oral cancer and other serious oral health problems.

Oral cancer can affect any part of your mouth and lips. These cancers can be hard to detect and are often very aggressive. Smoking is the single biggest cause of oral cancer. If you drink alcohol, this increases your risk further.

If you develop a good oral health care routine, this will involve looking in your mouth to make sure there are no white patches, red patches or ulceration in your mouth.

If you notice something unusual, you should make an appointment to see your dentist as soon as possible.

Do I really need to see my dentist every six months?

Your dentist will have assessed your risk of developing dental disease and will have suggested an appropriate checkup schedule for you based on these findings. If you have gum disease, a very dry mouth and/or medical problems, it may be better to attend more frequently. If you're fit and healthy with good oral health, check-ups can be less frequent. Ask your dentist for specific advice for you.

If you are at all concerned about your progress or have any queries, please contact the surgery:

- During hours _____
- After hours _____