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**HEALTHY SMILE**

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**HEALTHY YOU**

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**HOW YOUR ORAL HEALTH  
IMPACTS YOUR  
COMPLETE HEALTH**



## **Brush twice a day. Floss every day. See your dentist regularly.**

We all know the “rules.” And we all want a sparkling, healthy smile. But why do the rules exist?

It’s taken a very long time, but finally medical professionals are realizing that the connection between the body and the mouth is huge. Research is proving that if we can keep our smiles healthy, we can help to reduce our risk of heart attack, stroke, uncontrolled diabetes, and preterm labor, and possibly many other conditions as well.

When a dental professional examines you, there is a lot they can see. Many medical conditions have symptoms that can be seen in the mouth, including nutritional deficiencies, diabetes, heart disease, rheumatoid arthritis, and autoimmune diseases. Often in these cases, your dental professional will be the first to alert you to a possible medical condition, and will suggest you see your physician to address it.



### **Spotted**

Your mouth can set off all sorts of health alarms before the rest of your body shows signs. The health of your smile can be an early indicator of:

- nutritional deficiencies
- diabetes
- heart disease
- rheumatoid arthritis
- autoimmune diseases
- oral cancer
- osteoporosis

### **What your gums are telling you**

Bacteria is constantly creating plaque, and that plaque sticks to your teeth and gums. Plaque will cause an inflammatory response in the body, making your gums swell, bleed and become very sore. This is called gingivitis. Left unchecked, gingivitis can lead to periodontal disease, which is an infection of the gums and support structures holding your teeth in place.

Research shows that chronic gum infections are associated with uncontrolled diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and preterm birth. Science doesn’t know yet if the gum infections cause these issues, or if they are just an oral manifestation of a problem that already existed, but scientists continue their research to find out.

Science has proven a link between some conditions and gum disease. For instance:

*1. Poorly controlled diabetes:* If you have been diagnosed with diabetes, dental professionals know to be on the lookout for gum disease. That’s because you are at a higher risk of gum inflammation and infection, since your body is

more prone to infection. If you have chronic gingivitis or periodontal disease, however, it will be harder for you to control your blood sugar. That's because any infection causes insulin resistance.

*2. Cardiovascular disease:* It turns out that the bacteria in your mouth that cause gum inflammation also cause inflammation in your arteries. This can lead to clogged/blocked arteries, which can cause heart attacks and strokes through increased arterial plaque formation. And research is showing that the more severe the oral infection, the higher your risk of heart attack and stroke.

*3. Preterm birth:* Most pregnant women have some form of gingivitis, due to an increase in blood volume. If you have a gum infection during pregnancy, you have a higher risk of preterm labor/delivery and a low birth weight baby. Since bacteria release toxins, it is thought that those toxins reach the baby via the placenta, causing slowed growth in the baby and stimulating the mother's body to produce substances that trigger labor too soon.<sup>1</sup>

## **On the Lookout for Oral Cancer**

Over 45,000 Americans will be diagnosed with oral cancer each year. It is a cancer that is historically high in mortality, not because it's difficult to treat, but because it is typically found at a very late stage. Why? Because patients don't typically notice any symptoms of the disease until it has spread to other areas of the body.<sup>2</sup>

People who smoke or chew tobacco are at a higher risk of developing oral cancer. But anyone can get oral cancer. In past years, it was typically seen in adults over 40 years of age, but younger people are increasingly being diagnosed. Human papillomavirus (HPV) is thought to be the cause of the increase in diagnosis in younger people.<sup>3</sup>

An important part of every dental visit includes an oral cancer screening, typically performed during a routine cleaning appointment. A dental professional will check all areas of the mouth and feel under the tongue and around the outside of your head and neck for any signs of swelling, redness, or lesions. This exam is done regardless of age, ethnicity, or even risk factors because the goal is to detect and diagnose any oral cancer as quickly as possible. And, as noted before, the increase in young people getting diagnosed means every patient needs to be screened.

## **Oral Cancer Warning Signs:**

- Any lesion or sore spot that doesn't heal in 2 weeks
- Red or white patches on your lips or in your mouth
- Consistent bleeding from your mouth or throat
- Swelling or lumps anywhere in your mouth, neck or throat
- Persistent hoarseness or difficulty in swallowing

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<sup>1</sup> Colgate Professional "Oral Health And Overall Health: Why A Healthy Mouth Is Good For Your Body": <http://www.colgateprofessional.com/patient-education/articles/why-a-healthy-mouth-is-good-for-your-body>

<sup>2</sup> Oral Cancer Foundation "Oral Cancer Facts" <http://www.oralcancerfoundation.org/facts/>

<sup>3</sup> Delta Dental "Oral Cancer: What you need to know" [https://www.deltadentalins.com/oral\\_health/oral\\_cancer.html](https://www.deltadentalins.com/oral_health/oral_cancer.html)

As dental professionals, it's important to us that we are partners with you in keeping you healthy and happy. (As much as 90% of systemic diseases have oral manifestations.) And that means more to us than just making sure your smile is beautiful. We want to do everything we can to keep our patients healthy, and that includes education on the links between a healthy smile and a healthy you. According to the American Association of Endodontists, "Whatever the cause, it is important to know that tooth loss has been associated with heart disease, greater mortality and a decline in physical or mental abilities, especially in the elderly."<sup>4</sup>

### **Saliva: your first line of defense**

Saliva is one of your body's first defenses against bacterial attack. If your saliva isn't healthy, chances are, neither is the rest of you. Saliva contains powerful enzymes and antibodies that can keep the balance of good and bad bacteria in check.

Saliva not only keeps your mouth comfortable, it helps to begin breaking down your food and protect your teeth from the acids and other substances in your food that can damage them.<sup>5</sup> If you take medications or have a condition (like diabetes) that lessens the amount of saliva your body produces, these processes can be compromised. This is commonly called dry mouth. Food may taste different, your tongue and gums may swell and become sore, and you will be at greater risk of cavities, bad breath and gum disease.<sup>6</sup>

### **Signs you should see your dentist:**

- A white, cottage-cheese-like substance in your mouth
- Dark or very white spots on your teeth (a sign of possible decay)
- The feeling of a dry mouth
- Tongue swelling
- Painful gums, or gums that bleed easily when brushing

### **Save your smile. Save your wallet**

There's more than one bonus to keeping up a healthy mouth: saving money! Insurance companies estimate people with periodontal disease who receive appropriate dental care will save between \$1,000 and nearly \$3,000. They also have 12.5% fewer tooth extractions.<sup>7</sup> Who doesn't want to keep their natural teeth and save money?

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<sup>4</sup> American Association of Endodontists "Healthy Mouth Leads To A Healthy Body": [https://www.aae.org/uploadedfiles/news\\_room/press\\_releases/kyr\\_matrelease.pdf](https://www.aae.org/uploadedfiles/news_room/press_releases/kyr_matrelease.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> American Dental Hygienists' Association "Saliva-- your mouth's most powerful natural defense against decay" [https://www.adha.org/resources-docs/7168\\_Saliva\\_Stimulation\\_Patient\\_Pamphlet.pdf](https://www.adha.org/resources-docs/7168_Saliva_Stimulation_Patient_Pamphlet.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> WebMD.com "Saliva and Your Mouth" <http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/what-is-saliva>

<sup>7</sup> Dentistry IQ "Integrated Care: Healthy Mouth, Healthy Body" <http://www.dentistryiq.com/articles/2014/08/integrated-care-healthy-mouth-healthy-body.html>