

Periodontal Disease Prevention

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Get regular dental checkups with professional cleaning, and make sure your children do, too. Children should receive regular fluoride treatments to help prevent decay and reduce periodontal disease. Studies show adults who got fluoride treatments as children have less periodontal disease.

Quit smoking.

Gum disease can be added to the long list of reasons why it's healthier not to smoke.

Drinking water helps reduce inflammation in the mouth by producing more saliva. Saliva dilutes toxins created by plaque. Also, the more water you drink, the less soda you're likely to consume, which means less sugar in your diet.

Eat healthier. A balanced diet enhances your overall health. The fewer sweets that you eat, the less sugar there is in your mouth to turn into corrosive acids that can cause tooth decay.

Dental health care products:

Look for the American Dental Association (ADA) Seal of Acceptance. This guarantees the ADA has reviewed the advertising claims for the product, finds them to be true, and ensures the product is safe and effective.

Because toothbrushes come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, choose one that fits the contour and size of your mouth. For most people, a four- or five-rowed, soft nylon-bristled toothbrush will do, but extra features can help. An extended tip helps reach back molars and the inside of your front teeth. Brushes with higher bristles in the center are better at reaching below the gum line. The rubber tip at the end of some brush handles is good for massaging the gums after brushing and flossing. Electric toothbrushes and new high-tech models that use sound waves remove significantly more plaque than ordinary brushes.

However, if you can't afford these, regular brushing with a manual toothbrush is much better than no brushing at all.

Toothpastes containing fluoride can deliver this chemical to the teeth and slightly under the gum line to protect against decay. Toothpastes can also whiten teeth, remove stains and prevent bad breath. Some toothpastes also reduce the amount of bacteria around the teeth and help reduce bleeding from gingivitis. Some tartar control toothpastes help reduce tartar, but only above the gum line. Avoid highly abrasive toothpastes, which can add to gum damage, and tooth whiteners made with carbamide peroxide. That chemical breaks down into hydrogen peroxide, which may injure gums and soften tooth surfaces.

And don't bother to mix baking soda with your toothpaste.

There's no evidence the combination is effective against gingivitis or periodontitis.

Choose a dental floss that does not shred or fray and isn't so thin it cuts the gum or can't be guided gently down and around the sides of your teeth. If your teeth are very close together, try a floss made of Gore-Tex®. It costs a bit more, but it slips more easily between tight teeth and will not tear on sharp edges. Dental tape may also work if you have trouble with floss. If you have difficulty using floss or have bridgework, a floss threader may help. Special picks, small brushes and other interdental cleaners are handy for wide spaces between teeth. Standard toothpicks should never be used for regular hygiene.

The only mouthwashes shown to fight plaque are over-the-counter Listerine® and the prescription-only ones containing chlorhexidine (Peridex®, PerioGard®). Listerine reduces bacteria, plaque and gingivitis when used for 30 seconds twice a day. Rinses containing chlorhexidine should not be used at the time of brushing to avoid interaction between, and

possible inactivation of, certain chemicals found in both products.

Rinses are not a substitute for brushing and flossing.

Oral irrigators (water spraying devices) don't remove plaque unless used with brushing and flossing.

For Your Information

Resources

Books

Gorbach, S. L., J. G. Bartlett, and N. R. Blacklow. Infectious Diseases. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Co., 1998.

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