

Oral Health

Oral health: Tips for proper dental care

Get daily dental care tips and learn ways to protect your oral health. See which symptoms should prompt a call to your dentist.

Don't take your smile for granted. Maintain good oral health by practicing regular dental care habits and reporting problems to your dentist promptly. Clean your teeth daily and see your dentist one to two times a year to prevent gum disease and other oral health problems.

Brushing for oral health

Follow these tips on how to brush your teeth:

Brush your teeth at least twice a day and ideally after every meal, using fluoride-containing toothpaste.

Use a soft-bristled toothbrush — it's gentler on your gums.

To brush properly, hold your toothbrush at a slight angle against your teeth and use short back-and-forth motions.

Brush the inside and chewing surfaces of your teeth.

Brush your teeth for about two minutes each time you brush.

Brush your tongue.

Avoid vigorous or harsh scrubbing, which can irritate your gums.

Replace your toothbrush every three or four months, or sooner if it becomes frayed.

Consider using an electric toothbrush, especially if you have arthritis or other problems that make it difficult to brush well.

Flossing for oral health

A toothbrush can't reach all the tight spaces between your teeth or the areas under your gumline. That can allow plaque to build up, threatening your oral health. Flossing, though, removes those particles and improves oral health.

Follow these tips on how to floss your teeth:

When you floss, gently ease the floss between your teeth.

Pull the ends of the floss against the front and back surface of a tooth so that the floss forms a "C" as it wraps around the tooth.

Gently pull the floss from the gumline to the top of the tooth to scrape off plaque.

Floss the backs of your teeth.

Use fresh floss as you progress through your teeth.

If you have trouble getting floss through your teeth, try waxed floss.

If it's hard to manipulate the floss, try using a floss holder.

Other oral health care tips

Brushing and flossing are the mainstays of good dental care and oral health. In addition to those, you may also want to consider these oral health tips:

Use an interdental cleaner, such as a dental pick or dental stick specially designed to clean between your teeth.

Use a mouth rinse to help reduce plaque between your teeth.

Use oral irrigators, or devices that aim a stream of water at your teeth, to remove food particles.

Don't use toothpicks or other objects that aren't made to clean your teeth.

Oral health problems to report to your dentist

Call your dentist promptly if you develop any of the following signs and symptoms that may suggest oral health problems:

Red, tender or swollen gums

Gums that bleed when you're regularly brushing and flossing

Gums that are pulling away from your teeth, which may make your teeth seem longer

Pus around your teeth and gums when you press on the gums

A bad taste in your mouth

Loose teeth

Changes in the way your top and bottom teeth touch

Changes in the feel of your dentures

Sensitivity to hot and cold