

***Healthy Teeth, Healthy Life: The Importance of
Good Oral Hygiene Throughout Life
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Teeth are an integral part of our overall health and we need to take good care of them throughout our entire lives. If they are properly cared for, our teeth will look good, feel good and contribute to a healthy mouth and body. Here are some useful oral health tips for all ages:

Infants and Toddlers (newborn to 3 years)

- The first primary (or ‘baby’) teeth appear at about six months of age.
- Avoid giving your infant sweet drinks, such as juice, in their bottle or sweet pacifiers, especially before bedtime. Frequently cited as a cause of cavities in children, these practices increase exposure to cavity-causing carbohydrates. Also avoid milk and formula before bedtime. Use plain water instead.
- Be sure to use a soother that has an orthodontic design.
- Rinse the infant’s mouth after giving any medication, as it is usually sweetened for taste.
- First birthday = first visit to the dental office. While infants might not have any immediate problems, there’s no better time to begin prevention and learn proper care than right from the very beginning.
- Second birthday = first visit with a dental hygienist.
- Gently clean newly erupted teeth with a gauze or washcloth.
- Begin flossing when most of the baby teeth are in.
- Use a pea-size amount of toothpaste.
- Early exposure to fluoride will help make bones and teeth strong. However, too much fluoride can cause fluorosis, a white to brown mottling or streaking of the permanent teeth in the front of the mouth.
- Infants can suffer from oral infections and early childhood cavities
- Early Childhood Caries (ECC) is a severe form of tooth decay in the primary teeth of infants and toddlers. It affects more than 10 per cent of preschool-age children in Canada. Causes of ECC include the caregiver passing bacteria to the child (e.g. through kisses), the amount of sugars and starches in the diet, and the time and frequency of feedings.
- Toddlers who have ECC tend to remain high risk and often develop cavities in their adult teeth.

Children (3+)

- The shedding of primary (or ‘baby’) teeth occurs from the ages of 6 and 12.
- Parents or caregivers should clean children’s teeth until the age of 6 to ensure proper cleaning.
- It is important to teach good oral hygiene care to children at this time so they keep it with them for life.

Teens (13+)

- A thorough teeth cleaning 1-2 times per day is sufficient.
- Brushing should take approximately three minutes.
- Bulimia and binge eating, more common among teen females, results in vomiting that can severely erode tooth enamel and over time, teeth become loose, worn and translucent. Mouth, throat and salivary glands may become swollen and bad breath may result.
- Oral piercing, a wide variety of potential risks associated with oral piercing include infections, pain and chipped teeth from tongue jewellery, difficulty with chewing and swallowing. Some home care tips following a piercing; brush after every meal, use mouthwash; use warm salt water rinses frequently
- Aside from being unhealthy, smoking can cause staining, increased severity of periodontal disease, bad breath (or halitosis) and oral cancer.
- Those with braces should use a toothbrush (or a specially designed orthodontic toothbrush) and superfloss or floss threaders. Mouthwash containing fluoride may help prevent cavities from occurring. Oral irrigators are an excellent adjunct to regular brushing and flossing. Avoid hard to chew food as it can often lead to loosened bands. Stay away from gum and caramel as it can cause damage to wires and brackets.
- Mouthguards should always be used during recreational and athletic activities to protect the mouth and teeth from serious injury, should be worn during all recreational and athletic activities particularly where there is contact, e.g. football, hockey soccer and boxing just to name a few. A mouthguard can prevent serious injuries such as dislodged or knocked out tooth/teeth, concussion, broken or chipped tooth, jaw fracture, bitten or lacerated tongue and/or lip.

Adults (18+)

- Vitamin D is vital for strengthening teeth throughout the life.
- Vitamin C is important in the prevention of gum disease (60 milligrams/day).
- As many as 75% of adults over the age of 30 suffer from some degree of gum disease.
- Bacteria from gum disease can spread to other parts of the body, linking gum disease to other serious health concerns including:
 - Heart disease and stroke
 - Pneumonia and other respiratory diseases
 - Diabetes
 - Premature births and low birth weight babies.
- Cigarette smoking may play a major role in more than 1/2 of the cases of severe gum disease in adults.
- Expectant mothers who suffer from 'morning sickness' should try to rise or brush their teeth often. Turning your head down over the sink while brushing will help relax the throat and allow saliva to flow out.
- With poor oral care, bacteria, or plaque, collects at the gum line causing gingivitis (inflammation of the gums), and eventually periodontitis (inflammation of the underlying bone). This can lead to eventual loss of the entire tooth.
- Smokers are four times more likely to have periodontitis than people who have never smoked.

Seniors

- Seniors are just as at risk of getting cavities as children and adults. They need to concentrate on the roots of the teeth since dentures can push plaque down towards the gum line.
- Partial or complete denture wearers need to clean the mouth and have regular check-ups.
- The average life span of dentures is about 5-7 years
- Polishing of dentures by a professional is recommended once or twice per year.
- Rinse and brush dentures and natural teeth after every meal. Brush dentures inside and out (using a denture brush) using warm water and a mild soap or denture toothpaste. Pay extra attention to the spaces between 'teeth' and the areas that come into contact with your gums.
- Floss between natural teeth and/or stimulate your gums.
- Dentures should be removed daily and soaked for several hours or overnight.
- Those with arthritis can ask their dental hygienist about an arthritis friendly toothbrush and easier ways to floss.

Dental Hygienists and the CDHO

A dental hygienist is an important member of the oral health care team. She/he provides professional treatment and advice to help prevent gum disease and dental cavities, as well as to support and promote total wellness.

All practicing dental hygienists are regulated health professionals who have been educated at a recognized university or college. In Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, dental hygienists are registered with their respective provincial regulatory body. The Colleges are self-regulating organizations that regulate dental hygienists to ensure the public receives safe and effective dental hygiene care. In Ontario, dental hygienists are registered with the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario (CDHO), which is celebrating 10 years of self-regulation in 2004. Dental hygienists in Manitoba and the Atlantic provinces are governed through dental regulatory bodies but are actively pursuing self-regulation.