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Taking Care of Your Teeth

Health and well-being include all aspects and parts of the body, including the mouth. Good oral health supports life-long health and achievements in education, employment, and social relationships. Unfortunately, tooth decay or dental caries (cavities) and periodontal disease are bacterially mediated processes that infect many children, most adults, and the elderly. These two common diseases are preventable, but they remain highly prevalent. The best protection from dental caries is good oral hygiene, regular access to professional care, a healthy diet of low sugar food and beverages, the mineral fluoride, and dental sealants.

Your teeth are meant to last a lifetime. The main diseases in the mouth are tooth decay, gingivitis (gum disease), and periodontal disease. These can be almost completely avoided by the daily removal of bacteria. A toothbrush with worn-out bristles cannot clean your teeth properly. Try to replace your toothbrush at least every three to four months.

What is plaque?

Plaque is made up of millions of germs or bacteria that combine into a sticky film that builds up on teeth. It is important to remove this plaque daily to prevent these germs from releasing acid and other products that can cause cavities and harm your gums and the bone that supports your teeth. Spend at least two minutes brushing all sides of your teeth. Use floss to remove the germs in hard-to-reach places, such as between teeth and under gums.

A dental home care plan should include:

- Twice daily toothbrushing with a **soft** toothbrush that is not worn out or frayed.
- Using dental floss daily to clean areas that are hard for your toothbrush to reach between your teeth and under the gumline.
- Using a toothpaste with fluoride
- Eating balanced meals and limiting foods/drinks that are high in sugar or carbohydrates.
- Limiting how often you eat/drink.
- Mouthwash is optional, but it may be a helpful addition to a daily hygiene routine.

To properly remove the plaque on your teeth, follow these steps:

- Clean in between your teeth with dental floss before toothbrushing. Wrap the floss around your fingers and make a "C" shape around your tooth. Move up and down several times. Do this on both sides of each tooth.
- With brushing, start by brushing the sides of your teeth that touch your cheek. Angle your

toothbrush so it is up against your teeth and gums and in a circular motion jiggle the toothbrush back and forth in small strokes. Do only a few teeth at a time and do it several times in each spot.

- When you have completed the cheek side of your top and bottom teeth, brush the side that faces your tongue on the top and bottom teeth in the same way.
- Brush the chewing surfaces of your top and bottom teeth. These surfaces have many deep grooves where germs can “hide out.” Brush or use a tongue cleaner when you finish brushing your teeth to help your mouth feel fresher.

Resources

NOTE: This fact sheet was derived from one previously published by the Arizona Department of Health Services.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/basics/index.html>

American Dental Association – Mouth Healthy

<https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/t/toothbrushes>