

VITAMIN

Vital health information in a minute

Brush up on oral health

Healthy mouth, healthier you

Having a healthy smile isn't just about how you look on the outside. It can make a big difference in how you feel. Oral health can affect self-esteem, school performance and attendance at both work and school.¹ Problems with your teeth can negatively affect your mood and emotional state, and may lead to embarrassment or anxiety in social situations. That's why taking care of your mouth and seeking treatment for dental problems is so important.

Your mouth can give clues about what's happening in the rest of your body, too. A look in your mouth can tell your dentist or doctor a lot about your overall health.²

Risk of infection

The mouth is a place where bacteria can grow rapidly. Without frequent brushing and flossing, bacteria can lead to oral infections, tooth decay and gum disease. Certain bacteria may be able to travel from the mouth to the lungs, increasing the risk of pneumonia and other respiratory infections. Having diabetes can lower the body's ability to fight off bacteria and increase the risk of a serious infection. *What you can do:* Brush, floss and use mouthwash to get rid of bacteria.

Gum disease

Gum disease is caused by the buildup of plaque (a sticky film of bacteria) on the teeth. Gum tissue may appear swollen and red and is likely to bleed. Gum disease can lead to tooth loss and may be linked to a higher risk of heart disease. Having advanced gum disease may signal health problems and make it difficult to manage diabetes and other conditions. *What you can do:* Keep up with regular dental visits and follow your dentist's advice.

Sources:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Oral Health Basics. <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/basics/index.html> (last reviewed/updated April 30, 2020).

2. Mayo Clinic. Oral health: A window to your overall health. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/dental/art-20047475> (last reviewed/updated June 4, 2019).

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