



Maintaining good oral health is critical for a beautiful smile and pain-free teeth and gums. But did you know that your oral health may affect your heart's health, too?

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How might my oral health affect my heart?

Growing evidence suggests that poor oral health can lead to a heart attack or stroke. While a direct connection has yet to be established, more studies are finding a link between periodontal (gum) disease and cardiovascular disease. In one study, the risk for heart disease among people with periodontal disease was nearly three times higher than those without it.¹

One theory for this link is that increased oral bacteria form plaque in the arteries, break off and lodge in the brain or heart. With heart disease the number one killer of both women and men, additional research is being pursued.² As a precaution, be sure to maintain good oral health and talk with your dentist about your risks.

What is good oral health?

- The first key to good oral health is to **brush** your teeth as often as your dentist recommends. Most people brush at least twice a day. Also, check with your dentist and see if there's a right toothbrush for you—dentists often suggest a soft-bristled brush.

When it comes to technique, it's not how *hard* you brush, but *how* you brush. Be sure to reach all the surfaces between your teeth and gums, rather than just apply more pressure. To best reach the outsides and insides of your teeth, hold your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle to your gums and use short back-and-forth motions. Hold the brush

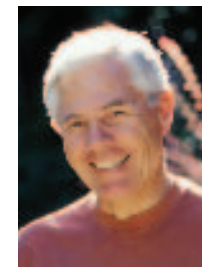
vertically to reach the backs of upper and lower front teeth. Use a back-and-forth motion to clean the crevices on the chewing surfaces of your teeth.

Removing food debris from your teeth ensures that sugar and acids don't wear down the enamel on your teeth, which leads to tooth decay. Don't forget to brush your tongue and the inside of your cheeks—both have pores where bacteria hide.



- Second, use dental **floss** or an interdental cleaner everyday. Flossing removes tooth-decay causing plaque from places that your toothbrush can't reach, as well as food debris that, if left between your teeth, causes bad breath and leads to gum disease. Be sure to rinse your mouth when you're finished flossing. Antibacterial mouthwashes may also help.
- Finally, **diet** contributes to oral health. Sweets, soft drinks and other nonnutritious foods can lead to tooth decay when bacteria in the mouth mix with the sugars in these foods and produce acids that attack the teeth. Brush after meals and limit snacking to help minimize this risk. Drinking water throughout the day also helps rinse the mouth and neutralizes harsh acids.

Maintaining good oral health also requires professional care. Visit your dentist regularly for professional cleanings and oral exams and inform your dentist immediately if you experience any of the following conditions:



- red, swollen or tender gums
- bleeding while brushing or flossing
- gums that pull away from the teeth and/or loose or separating teeth
- red, white or swollen areas in any part of your mouth
- persistent bad breath

Alert your dentist if you are diabetic, pregnant, receiving chemotherapy or taking medications for a chronic medical condition, or if there has been any change in your health. Your dentist can help you manage oral conditions that may result from your medical condition.

Educating yourself on these and other important oral health topics will help you maintain a brighter smile and a healthier you!

Additional related information can be found on the Web sites of the Academy of General Dentistry, www.agd.org and the American Dental Association, www.ada.org; and in Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2000.

1. *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General*, 2000.

2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006.