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Preventive Oral Care for Everyone

Oral Health: Infant to Teen

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Speaking, smiling, laughing, tasting, chewing and swallowing—these everyday functions all depend on and impact your oral and overall health.

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Oral Health

**AND YOUR
OVERALL WELL-BEING**



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What is oral health?

Your oral health includes more than strong and healthy teeth. Oral health also refers to the condition of your:

- upper and lower jaws
- gums and supporting tissues
- chewing muscles
- roof of your mouth
- all linings of the mouth and throat
- tongue
- lips
- salivary glands

In addition, branches of the nervous, immune and vascular systems are involved in protecting, nourishing and moving these parts as well as connecting them to the brain and the rest of the body.

Oral health also includes the absence of toothaches and other oral and facial pains, oral and throat cancers, and addresses birth defects such as cleft lip and palate.



Why is oral health important?

A great smile. Fresh breath. Pain-free teeth and gums. These are the known benefits of good oral health. But they're only part of the picture. Your oral health is essential to your general health and well-being. In fact, growing research suggests a link between chronic oral infection and various medical conditions, including:*

- diabetes
- heart disease
- respiratory disease
- stroke
- low birth-weight/premature babies

Taking care of your teeth and gums benefits more than your smile!

How does oral health affect general health?

Your mouth is a gateway to your body. What you put in your mouth—food, drink, medications and tobacco products—impacts not only your oral health, but also your overall health and well-being.

At the extreme, poor oral conditions can interfere with breathing, eating, swallowing, sleeping and speaking. It's difficult to ignore the rapidly growing evidence indicating a relationship between mouth and body.*

There's a link between mouth and mind, too. Self-image and self-esteem can be affected by oral health conditions such as birth defects, chronic pain, cold sores, oral yeast infections and cancers. These

conditions can interfere with daily activities—working, school and social interactions—and may result in lost productivity, chronic stress and depression.

With so many connections between your oral health and overall well-being, it's not surprising that the mouth has been called a "mirror" for what's happening inside your body. Fortunately, early signs and symptoms of some



conditions and diseases can be detected in the mouth,* and with such easy access, saliva may one day become a medical diagnostic substance of choice.

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.

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