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Smile. Sparkle. Shine.

Your Oral Health Guide to a Healthier Body



The Importance Of Oral Health

Make your whole body smile.

A great smile can make all the difference. In fact, studies show that when your mouth is healthy, the rest of your body stays healthier, too. Consider:

- Stroke, heart disease and low birth-weight can all be tied to gum disease.
- 90 percent of all systemic diseases have some kind of oral manifestation.
- Infections in the mouth can lead to infections in major organs, such as the heart and heart valves.
- Poor mouth care can lead to oral cancer, which takes more lives each year than cervical or skin cancer.
- Poor oral health also contributes to intestinal failure, irritable bowel syndrome, and a host of other conditions.

Clearly, taking good care of your teeth and gums is a healthy, preventive measure.

1. Have regular oral exams and cleanings
2. Flossing and brushing twice daily with fluoride toothpaste, will not only improve your smile, but could possibly even improve your overall health.

Your mouth is also one of the first places medical professionals look when searching for symptoms of disease. Many conditions — diabetes, leukemia, cancer, heart disease, kidney disease and others — can be diagnosed and treated much sooner when discovered during a simple oral examination.

For this reason, routine dental visits are crucial to good health. It is also why dental coverage is an important health factor. Dental coverage provides benefits not only when you have issues with your teeth and gums, but also for routine, preventive services that can assist in the early detection of health threatening conditions. Choosing to have dental coverage, and using those benefits, can go a long way to keeping you and your family healthy.

See your dentist regularly. Studies show that when your mouth is healthy, the rest of your body stays healthier, too.



Babies

Little mouths are a big responsibility.

It comes as a shock to many parents to learn that tooth decay often begins soon after a baby's first teeth appear.



A bottle may soothe a crying baby, but the same bottle can be a cause of tooth decay. Frequent exposure to sugary liquids such as milk, formula, fruit juice and soda can feed the bacteria on a child's teeth and gums, resulting in an increase in plaque build-up.

To avoid baby bottle tooth decay, never allow your child to fall asleep with a bottle. Wean your child from the bottle as soon as they can drink from a cup (although not too soon because sucking aids in

facial muscle development). In addition, clean your baby's gums once a day by using moistened gauze or a washcloth to gently massage the gum tissues.

Plaque removal should start when the first tooth appears. Brush your child's teeth gently with a soft toothbrush and a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste. Children should spit out toothpaste, being careful not to swallow any. About six months after the first tooth breaks the surface, it's time to schedule a dentist appointment.

Preventing tooth decay in young children is a parent's responsibility. Pain, infection and extraction of teeth can result if tooth decay is left untreated, while problems like speech difficulty and crooked teeth may develop later.

Make sure your child has healthy baby teeth and strong, healthy permanent teeth will usually follow.

*Never allow
your baby
to fall asleep
with a bottle.*



Children

Healthy beginnings: your child's first dental visit.

Good oral health habits start early. To ensure a healthy mouth for years to come, it's a good idea to schedule your child's first dentist appointment six months after their first teeth appear. With proper planning and a little patience, it can be a positive experience for the parent and child.

Schedule appointments early in the day when children are alert and fresh.

Before the visit, try to eliminate any surprises by asking your dentist what a typical first appointment is like. Then talk to your child about what they can expect. Remember to bring your child's medical records.

Plan what you'll do if your child becomes frightened, uncooperative or fussy. If your child becomes uncooperative, you might even consider a series of short, successive visits, which can help build your child's trust in you and the dentist and ease anxiety about future visits. Scheduling appointments earlier in the day, when children are alert and fresh, helps as well.

Of course, good oral health doesn't end with that first appointment. Children, like adults, should see their dentist regularly. Until a child is old enough to take personal responsibility for their daily dental health routine, it's up to the parents to help them with brushing and flossing.

Show children the proper way to brush and floss, letting them do it themselves and then finishing yourself, if necessary, to remove all the plaque. Usually by age five or so, a child will be able to brush their own teeth, of course with proper parental encouragement.

But don't forget: The best way to instill proper oral hygiene in your child is by example. Children who see adults taking good care of their teeth and gums are more likely to have healthy mouths themselves.

What to expect:

Introductory dental visits usually last 15-30 minutes & may include:

- A gentle examination of the teeth, jaw, bite, gums & oral tissues.
- A gentle cleaning removing plaque, tartar build-up & stains.
- X-rays (depending upon age).
- A demonstration of proper brushing technique.
- Assessment of the need for fluoride.

Additional resources for children: Visit www.ada.org/public/games/story.asp for an interactive story, "Visit the dentist with Marty".

Teens

Help them grow into healthy habits.

Teenagers seem to do everything a little faster than adults. But their fast-paced lifestyle can have a long-lasting impact on the health of their teeth and gums, as well as the rest of their body.

Many teens use quick meals like nutrition bars and carbonated beverages to keep them on the move. Unfortunately, soda and sugar-loaded high carbohydrate foods have devastating and irreversible effects on oral health. In fact, an increase in drinking carbonated beverages may be behind a large increase in cavities for today's teens. Studies show that the acids in these drinks break down tooth enamel, which can lead to more extensive dental treatments and eventually, tooth loss.

More than that, phosphoric acid (found in most regular and diet cola drinks) can reduce bone density at a time when bones are growing rapidly. By age 16 girls have accumulated 90 to 97 percent of their bone mass, yet only 19 percent of girls ages nine to 19 are getting the recommended daily allowance of calcium. Drinking large amounts of soda only makes things worse.



To reverse the trend, talk to your teen about the long-term effects of sugary drinks and snacks. What they learn now can help them for the rest of their lives.

Carbonated beverages are a significant cause of cavities in teens.



Men

Know the risks; beat the odds.

The numbers don't look good for men and oral health:

- 34 percent of men aged 30 to 54 have periodontitis, compared to 23 percent of women.
- 56 percent of men aged 55 to 90 have periodontitis, compared to 44 percent of women.
- 33 percent of men have not had a medical checkup in the past year.
- Men brush their teeth less than twice per day on average.

So how do you beat the odds? First, know the risks, and then take the correct steps to prevent them. Fortunately, the most common diseases and conditions of the mouth are easy to spot and prevent.

Periodontal disease occurs when untreated plaque hardens into tartar, causing irritation and breakdown of the fibers that hold the gums tightly to the teeth. Beyond a simple matter of oral hygiene, periodontal disease can have much more serious health consequences, especially as it relates to diabetes. See your dentist if you experience loose or separating teeth, persistent bad breath, or red, swollen or bleeding gums.

Effects of medication on oral health are numerous and should not be overlooked. Since men are more likely to suffer from heart attacks, they are more likely to be on medications that cause dry mouth, which increases the risk of dental caries (cavities). Certain blood pressure medications and antidepressants have similar side effects. If you use tobacco, you are at an increased risk for periodontal disease and especially oral cancers.

Oral cancer is most often found on the tongue, the floor of the mouth, the lips and the gums—and affects men twice as often as women. If not diagnosed and treated early, oral cancer can spread quickly, leading to chronic pain, facial disfigurement as a result of surgery and even death. More than 34,000 people will be diagnosed with oral cancer this year, and 8,000 die each year from oral and pharyngeal (throat) diseases, so it is important to see a dentist frequently for examinations, cleanings and screenings.

Be aware, protect yourself and think prevention—and the odds will be on your side.

Periodontal disease may have more serious health consequences, especially as it relates to diabetes.



Women

Special needs for that special smile.

For every stage of a woman's life, there are unique health challenges to consider. Oral health is no exception as it is affected by changes in habits and hormones from puberty through menopause.

During puberty, a surge in hormones may cause swollen gums, especially during menstruation. Mouth lesions and ulcers also can develop, and girls may experience sensitive gums that are more easily irritated.

The use of oral contraceptives may promote gingivitis since they mimic pregnancy and contain progesterone or estrogen. In addition, women who use birth control pills are more likely to develop a dry socket after tooth extraction and should consult their dentist before scheduling major dental procedures.

Pregnancy may increase the risk of inflammation of the gums, and if plaque isn't removed regularly, gingivitis can occur that may lead to periodontitis. Studies indicate that women with periodontal disease may be at risk for pre-term low birth-weight babies and pregnancy tumors, while morning sickness can cause tooth erosion due to increased acid from vomiting. To neutralize the acid, rub a paste of baking soda and water on the teeth.

When menopause begins, some women experience dry mouth, burning sensations and changes in taste. Gums can become sore and sensitive, and hormone replacement therapy may cause gums to bleed, swell and become red.

Other factors should also be considered. Diet pills and certain other medications, for example, can decrease salivary flow, putting women at risk for cavities or gum disease. Smoking creates a higher risk for periodontal disease and oral cancers as well.

As a woman, good oral hygiene is important. Make brushing, flossing and dental visits part of your regular health routine and it will show with every smile.



Women with periodontal disease may be at risk for low birth-weight babies.





Diabetes And Pregnancy

Two conditions with special concerns.

The connection between oral health and overall health is becoming clearer every day. Dental health affects some of the body's most essential functions including speaking, chewing and swallowing. So, a mouth free of diseases like periodontal (gum) disease may in fact promote an overall healthier body.

More than 100 diseases show early symptoms in the mouth and may be first detected during a dental exam. In addition, periodontal disease, more commonly called gum disease, appears to negatively influence the body's overall health. Gum disease is the body's inflammatory response to the bacteria in the mouth and many diseases and health issues can be tied to these infections.

Pregnancy

According to the American Academy of Periodontology, pregnant women with periodontal disease may be much more likely to have a baby that's born too early or too small. Research indicates that a labor-inducing biological fluid is found in oral bacteria. This fluid increases with periodontal disease, thus increasing the risk of pre-term, low birth-weight babies.

Additional cleanings and exams during pregnancy can help keep you and your mouth healthier. By visiting your dentist for an additional cleaning (or a periodontal maintenance procedure if you have a history of periodontal surgery) during your pregnancy, you'll be improving your smile at the same time as helping to deliver a healthy baby.

Diabetes management

For diabetics, a healthy mouth can help keep diabetes in check. Increased sugar levels have a negative impact on oral health by increasing the risk of cavities, gum disease and tooth loss. In addition, diabetics who have gum disease find it far more difficult to control their sugar levels than those who do not have gum problems because the infections can cause increased blood sugar levels.

Visiting your dentist regularly, and even scheduling additional cleanings or periodontal maintenance procedures if you have a history of periodontal surgery, will help to keep you and your mouth healthier.

Gum disease is of particular importance to two conditions: diabetes and pregnancy.



Dental Sealants

Helping make cavities more preventable.

With the right tools, cavities are almost entirely preventable. Yet, caries remain the single most common chronic childhood disease – five times more common than asthma.¹

Dental sealants are an effective tool in the fight against cavities. Sealants have been shown to prevent decay on tooth surfaces with pits and fissures, where almost two thirds of all decay is found. The Journal of the American Dental Association (Vol. 139, March 2008) reviewed the research on sealants for children and adolescents and reported a reduction in incidence of caries as high as 86% in the first year following placement. In Arizona, 31% of eight year olds have at least one sealant. While this percentage demonstrates progress, Delta Dental of Arizona strives to support the Healthy People 2010 objective that 50% of Arizona eight year olds will have sealants preventing cavities.

To protect from tooth decay, the use of sealants is encouraged for permanent teeth of any child, adolescent or adult at risk for cavities. Sealants generally stop the need for the first filling, which is important because science has not yet developed permanent tooth filling materials. Avoiding the first filling lowers the lifetime cost of dental care and improves the patient's quality of life.

Ask your dentist about sealants and help keep little - and big mouths cavity free.

Other tips for better oral health:

- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush to reach every surface of each tooth.
- Replace your toothbrush every three months, when bristles are frayed, and after you've been sick.
- To clean the outside surfaces of your teeth, position your brush at a 45 degree angle where gums and teeth meet. Use short, gentle strokes in a circular motion.
- For inside surfaces of your upper and lower front teeth, hold the brush vertically. Use gentle back-and-forth strokes over teeth and gum tissue.
- For better flossing, insert floss between teeth using a back-and-forth motion. Don't force or snap the floss. Curve the floss into a C-shape against one tooth and then the other.



*Dental
sealants
significantly
reduce the risk
of cavities.*

¹ Department of Health and Human Services, Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General, May 2000



Choosing Dental Coverage

The choice is yours. You can choose to have dental coverage, or not. When the choice involves Ascent Benefits Company, your decision couldn't be easier. Whether you need group or individual dental coverage, we've put all our efforts into providing quality, affordable dental care for people just like you. Over the years, we've brought smiles to the residents of Colorado by offering:

- A large network of participating dentists that makes choosing a dentist simple – your existing dentist may very well already participate with us.
- Advanced dental benefits covering preventive as well as basic and major dental services.
- Award winning, local and friendly customer service representatives who answer your inquiries quickly and efficiently – and always with a smile.
- Additional benefits to help individuals with suppressed immune systems, diabetes and women who are pregnant manage their oral health.
- An interactive website for 24/7 service and information.

It's not just about a pretty smile any longer – it's about how a healthy mouth can help make your body healthier. Through innovative programs and services, technologically advanced customer service, a full suite of dental benefits, plus oral health resources (like this brochure) to help you keep healthy, Ascent Benefits Company is committed to keeping your mouth as healthy as possible and making your whole body smile. The choice is yours. Choose the "Benefits of Experience" and let Ascent Benefits give you something to smile about.

For information on our Group Plans, please contact your broker or call us at: 1-303-996-2849.

For information on our affordable Family and Individual Plans, please visit:
www.ascentbenefits.com/individual.



Our Mission

To deliver exceptional oral health and wellness benefits that honor the doctor/patient relationship, preserve patient choice, and bring value to employers and individuals alike.

A large, light blue graphic of three nested upward-pointing chevrons, similar to the one in the logo, is positioned behind the contact information.

www.ascentbenefits.com

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