

GUIDE TO PREVENTING CAVITIES AND MAINTAINING HEALTHY GUMS

99.9 percent of your oral health is dependent on you! Unfortunately your dentist and hygienist only spend a few hours per year with you. Use this guide to help you take care of your oral health. **Caries:** Caries is the technical term dentists use to describe the pathology that causes cavities or holes in your teeth. Caries are caused by acid attacking your tooth enamel that eventually enlarges to invade the dentin or soft portion of your tooth. The acid that causes caries can be directly from your diet in acidic foods and beverages, or from acidic bacterial waste products. The quantity and length of time this acid spends on your teeth dictates how severe caries may occur. It is important to reduce the amount and length of time acid spends on your teeth. It is also important to help your enamel resist acid attacks. **Gum Disease:** Your gums also react negatively to bacteria. Gums constantly attacked by bacteria can become inflamed, bleed, recess, and eventually cause bone loss around your teeth causing loose teeth that may eventually fall out. The following guide has been created to help you prevent caries, gingivitis (inflamed gums), and periodontitis (bone loss around teeth).

Oral Hygiene Protocol	Reason
Diet: Keep carbohydrates within meal time. Outside of meal time stay away from sticky and sweet foods. Reduce acidic foods. Use water to rinse your mouth after eating to restore a neutral PH. Don't allow babies to go to bed with a juice or chocolate milk bottle as they contain carbohydrates. Regular milk is much less prone to cause cavities.	Reducing the amount of time acid sits on your teeth is paramount for a healthy mouth. Sipping soda or coffee all day long makes the time acid attacks your enamel greater.
Toothbrushing: It is best to brush, floss, and rinse twice per day. Electric toothbrushes are more effective than manual toothbrushes. Oral-B has many great electric toothbrush options. Brush your teeth for two minutes as indicated by the toothbrush. If you see any white or yellow on your tongue, that's bacteria. Brush it off until your tongue is pink or get a double handed tongue scraper. A double handed tongue scraper makes you gag less than a single handed scraper. If you have sensitive teeth, you may want to alternate a Sensodyne toothpaste with your regular toothpaste.	Having an electric toothbrush is like having a vacuum versus a broom. It will oscillate many more times per second than you will ever be able to do with a manual toothbrush. It will also indicate when you apply too much pressure on your gums, preventing you from damaging your gums. Change your toothbrush or toothbrush head at least once every 3 months or after an illness. Using any toothpaste with an ADA seal of approval is best. If you get canker sores, you may want to switch to a toothpaste without Sodium Lauryl Sulfate, an ingredient used as the foaming agent in toothpaste.
Flossing: Floss your teeth after you brush with waxed or unwaxed floss, making sure to wrap it around the cheek/tongue side of your teeth. Regular floss is the gold standard to get around all gum surfaces. As you age and your hands don't work as well as they used to, u-shaped floss pics may be used. Water flossers may be used as an adjunct to keep food particles away from your teeth. Platypus brand flossers make flossing with braces much easier. They may be purchased online.	Flossing reduces the bacteria around your gums and reduces inflammation, bleeding, and bone loss. If you see bleeding while flossing, concentrate on that area for a few days until you see the bleeding stop. Do not stop flossing if you get a water flosser. Water flossers are great for areas around the gum, but are less effective in areas between the teeth, which are common areas for caries.
Rinsing: Rinse after you floss with Listerine to reduce bacteria or use Act Fluoride Rinse to increase fluoride application.	Rinsing flushes loosened mouth bacteria left over from brushing and flossing. Use Listerine in general. If you have a specific need to increase fluoride, use Act Fluoride Rinse.
Regular Dental Visits: Visit your dentist regularly. For most adults this is every six months, but your dentist may request you be seen more often if you have specific needs.	Routine dental exams help you and your dentist identify problems when they are small. If you wait a long time between dental exams, you may allow small problems to become large problems requiring dental procedures like root canals, crowns, or extractions.
Additional Protocol for Specific Needs	
Clenching and Grinding: If you wake up with a sore jaw, or if you have flat, cracked, or generally aching teeth, your dentist might suggest a custom-made Occlusal Night Guard..	Occlusal Night Guards can help you with jaw pain, damaging teeth and dental work.
Dry Mouth: Use sugar free citrus flavored lozenges for dry mouth. These are specialty candy usually ordered online that increase salivary flow. You may also use salivary replacements like Biotin for those with severe dry mouth especially Sjogren's Syndrome. Ask your doctor if you are taking any medicines that cause dry mouth. You may need to walk around with a water bottle to increase hydration.	Dry mouth especially Sjogren's Syndrome can cause generalized caries as the bacteria adheres to teeth and natural antimicrobial substances in your saliva are lacking. Dry mouth can be caused by radiation, medicine, cancer, and aging.
Pathology: Sores in your mouth can be caused by bacteria, viruses, or can be pathologic. Your dentist may prescribe medicines that combat the source cause of your sores. If you have a sore that persists for more than two weeks you may be referred to a specialist to address that pathology.	It is important to detect and address any pathology as soon as it arises. We perform oral cancer screenings on all patients.
Trauma: Reduce trauma to your teeth. Don't chew ice, bite your nails, or use your teeth as tools. If you feel like you are grinding or clenching your teeth at night, you may benefit from a night guard.	Discuss with your doctor if you feel general soreness in your teeth, have a sore jaw in the morning, or see wear on the biting surfaces of your teeth.