

# How to Take Care of Your Smile



This sheet will give you tips to keep your mouth healthy. You know some of these, and others might be a surprise. Follow these tips to care for your smile and to help others do the same.



## WHY IS GOOD ORAL HEALTH IMPORTANT?

When you have good oral health, you have healthy teeth, tongue, and gums. Your gums are the soft area around the base of your teeth. Good oral health can give you fresh breath and a nice smile. Good oral health can also help you avoid problems that can cost you a lot of money.



## HOW CAN I GET THE MOST FROM BRUSHING MY TEETH?

When you brush the right way, you can keep plaque (pronounced 'plak') from building up. Plaque is the main thing that can cause tooth decay (cavities). Plaque can also cause disease of the gums. Gum disease can make you sore or make your gums bleed or your teeth fall out.

### Choose the right supplies.

- Choose a toothpaste with fluoride. Fluoride is a mineral that helps prevent tooth decay.
- Replace your toothbrush every 3 to 4 months. Choose a brush with soft bristles.

### Brush at the right times, and for enough time.

- Brush 2 times every day. Be sure one of these times is just before you go to bed, after you have finished eating and drinking for the day.
- Wait an hour to brush your teeth after you eat foods with a lot of sugar or acid.
- Brush for 2 minutes every time you brush.

### Move the toothbrush the right way. Many people don't know these tips!

- Hold your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle from your teeth or gums.
- Move your toothbrush in short circles.
- Brush your teeth, gums, and tongue gently.

### Brush your whole mouth. Be sure you brush:

- The inside and outside of all your teeth
- The areas where your teeth come together
- Your gums and the area where your gums connect with your teeth
- Your tongue

*Hold your toothbrush at 45-degree angle*





## WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO FLOSS MY TEETH?

When you floss, you can keep plaque from building up between your teeth, where your toothbrush cannot reach. This can help you prevent disease and bad breath. Floss your teeth 1 time every day. Follow these steps to floss your teeth:

1. Pull the floss from its container. You need about 18 inches of floss. For most adults, that's about as long as from your hand to your elbow.
2. Wrap almost half the floss around a finger from your left hand. Wrap the same amount of floss from the other side around a finger from your right hand. There should only be a few inches between your hands.
3. Hold the floss between your thumb and pointer finger on each hand.
4. Move the floss in a back-and-forth motion between each of your teeth. Gently press toward your gum as you do this so the floss goes between your teeth. Go all the way down to your gum.
5. Pull the floss so it is tight against the side of one tooth. Slide it up and down.
6. Pull the floss so it is tight against the side of the other tooth. Slide it up and down.
7. Move to the next set of teeth and repeat steps 4 through 6.



## HOW OFTEN SHOULD I VISIT MY DENTIST?

Visit your dentist 2 times each year (every 6 months). Even if you think your teeth and gums are healthy, your dentist may be able to find problems early.



## HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO PRACTICE GOOD ORAL HEALTH HABITS?

You can be a good role model for children and other adults. Ways you can help others:

- Put this sheet where others can see it.
- Let your children watch you brush and floss your teeth. Talk about each step as you do it. For example, you could say "I am wrapping some of the floss around this finger...and the rest of the floss around this finger."
- Help your children brush and floss their teeth until they can do it the right way. For a lot of kids, this is when they are around 7 years old.
- Take your children to the dentist 2 times each year (every 6 months). Start taking them as babies, as soon as they have their first tooth.

### Summary



The main things you can do to support good oral health in yourself and others:

- Brush your teeth 2 times each day.
- Floss your teeth 1 time each day.
- Visit your dentist 2 times every year (every 6 months).
- Teach others how to use good oral health habits.



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