



Stay Healthy: Start at the Top

Staying well starts at the top—with good oral health. When your gums, teeth, and mouth are healthy, it not only gives you something to smile about, there's now evidence that oral health is key to overall good health.

Want to learn more about your own oral health? Take this quick quiz and find out what you can do to improve your smile.

How Healthy Is Your Mouth?

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| 1. Do you brush less than once per day and floss less than several times per week? | Yes | No |
| 2. Do your gums bleed when you brush your teeth? | Yes | No |
| 3. Has it been longer than a year since your last dental visit? | Yes | No |
| 4. Are you diabetic? | Yes | No |
| 5. Have you had more than two fillings placed in the past two years? | Yes | No |
| 6. Do you prefer eating sweets to eating fruits and vegetables? | Yes | No |
| 7. Do you take medications that may cause a dry mouth? | Yes | No |
| 8. Do you smoke and/or have more than two drinks per day? | Yes | No |

Scoring Guide

A higher number of Yes answers to the preceding questions may put you more at risk of developing oral health problems or a worsening of your existing condition.

Learn More

1. Do you brush less than once per day, and floss less than several times per week?

Brushing and flossing are the most important things you can do for good oral health. Together, they help banish bacteria and keep your mouth healthy.

2. Do your gums bleed when you brush your teeth?

Bleeding gums may be a sign of inflammation, and sometimes, infection. Infections can be caused by bacteria that live in your mouth, but regular brushing and flossing will reduce the number of bacteria, help prevent infection, help reduce cavities, and keep your teeth and jawbone strong.

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And there's more: studies have shown that oral bacteria are connected with an increased risk for heart disease and stroke. So brush at least twice per day, and floss every day for oral—and overall—health.

3. Has it been longer than a year since your last dental visit?

Regular dental visits help keep your mouth—and your body—healthy. Just like your physician, your dentist is responsible for diagnosing and treating disease. Dental visits help detect everything from oral cancer to gum disease and tooth decay. However, it's up to you to take good care of your teeth and gums between dental visits—so brush, floss, and get regular dental checkups.

4. Are you diabetic?

Did you know that there is a connection between good oral health and controlling your diabetes? Those with diabetes are five times as likely to have periodontal disease or tooth loss than otherwise healthy individuals. Those with good oral hygiene may have better control of their diabetes as well.

5. Have you had more than two fillings placed in the past two years?

Having the occasional filling or crown is a normal part of restoring your oral health. However, if you always seem to need a lot of dental treatment, or have had gum problems in the past, you may want to make especially sure that you are taking care of your teeth and gums properly. Brushing with a soft toothbrush at least twice a day, flossing daily, and using a fluoride toothpaste will all help you minimize the need for additional work.

6. Do you prefer eating sweets to eating fruits and vegetables?

Candy or cantaloupe? For many of us, the answer is candy. However, most sweets are high in sugar. Sugar is oral bacteria's favorite food, and, after a sugary meal, bacteria give off acids that promote tooth decay and gum disease. While fruits and veggies also contain sugars, they are a much more nutritious way to satisfy a sweet craving—but remember: you'll still need to brush after a fruit or vegetable snack.

7. Do you take medications that cause a dry mouth?

Saliva is good for you. Not only does saliva wash away food particles that can stick and cause bacteria to increase, it also contains antibacterial properties. Many medications—from aspirin to allergy remedies—can cause a dry mouth and reduce the amount of saliva present. Read about the side effects of your medications or ask your pharmacist, physician, or dentist if the medicine you are taking can affect your oral health. Your dentist or physician may prescribe fluoride supplements or saliva substitutes.

8. Do you smoke and/or have more than two drinks per day?

Alcohol consumption and smoking are bad for your mouth and your body. Regular smokers are at a significantly higher risk of periodontal disease and a slightly higher risk of cavities. Smokers who drink more than two drinks per day further increase that risk. However, one of the most significant problem for smokers and heavy drinkers is oral cancer.

Oral cancer is often detected only after it's been around for some time, which means that it's harder to treat and has a higher mortality rate. If you smoke, stop. If you drink more than two drinks per day, cut back. And, visit your dentist regularly—particularly if you notice any lesions or sores in your mouth. Your dentist can conduct regular oral cancer screening exams—remember, early detection is key for effectively treating oral cancer.

