

## Men's oral health

### Why is oral health important?

Although most people have some oral health problem at some point in their lives, men of all ages are more likely than women to have more periodontal disease. A recent survey found that 34 percent of males aged 30 to 54 had periodontitis, compared to 23 percent of females. And, 56 percent of males aged 55 to 90 have periodontitis compared to 44 percent of females.

According to *Men's Health* and CNN, approximately one-third of American men have not had a checkup in the past year. Men make 150 million fewer trips to the doctor than women because they are afraid or embarrassed to go. Statistics show that men only brush their teeth 1.9 times per day.

### Why is periodontal disease a problem?

Periodontal disease is a result of plaque, which hardens into a rough, porous substance called tartar. The poisons produced and released by bacteria found in tartar irritate gums. These toxins cause the breakdown of fibers that anchor the gums tightly to the teeth, creating periodontal pockets that fill with even more toxins and bacteria.

The disease potentially may result in more serious

health consequences, such as diabetes. See your dentist if you have any of these symptoms:

- Bleeding gums during brushing
- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Persistent bad breath
- Loose or separating teeth

### Do you take medications?

Since men are more likely to suffer from heart attacks, they also are more likely to be on medications that can cause dry mouth. If you take medication for the heart or blood pressure, or if you take anti-depressants, your salivary flow could be inhibited, increasing the risk for dental caries. Saliva helps to reduce the bacteria found in your mouth.

### Do you use tobacco?

If you smoke or chew, you have a greater risk for gum disease and oral cancer. Men are affected twice as often as women, and 90 percent of oral cancers occur in those over 45 years of age.

The most frequent oral cancer sites are the tongue, the floor of the mouth, soft palate tissues in back of the tongue, lips, and gums. If not diagnosed and treated in its early stages, oral cancer can spread, leading to chronic pain, loss of function, irreparable facial and oral disfigurement following

surgery, and even death. More than 8,000 people die each year from oral and pharyngeal diseases. If you use tobacco, it is important to see a dentist frequently for cleanings and to ensure your mouth remains healthy. Your general dentist can perform a thorough screening for oral cancer.

### Do you play sports?

If you participate in sports, you have a greater potential for oral and dental trauma to your teeth. If you play contact sports, such as football, soccer, basketball, and even baseball, it is important to use a mouthguard, which is a flexible appliance made out of plastic that is worn in athletic and recreational activities to protect teeth from trauma. If you ride bicycles or motorcycles, wear a helmet.

### Taking care of your teeth

To take better care of your oral health needs, it is important to floss daily, brush your teeth with fluoride toothpaste twice daily and visit your dentist at least twice a year for cleanings. Here are some tips to better dental health.

- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush to reach every surface of each tooth. If the bristles on your toothbrush are bent or frayed, buy a new one.

- Replace your toothbrush every three months or after you've been sick.
- Choose a toothpaste with fluoride. This can reduce tooth decay by as much as 40 percent.
- Brush properly. To clean the outside surfaces of your teeth, position the brush at a 45-degree angle where your gums and teeth meet. Gently move the brush in a circular motion using short, gentle strokes. To clean the inside surfaces of the upper and lower front teeth, hold the brush vertically. Make several gentle back-and-forth strokes over each tooth and its surrounding gum tissue. Spend at least two-and-a-half minutes brushing.
- Floss properly. Gently insert floss between teeth using a back-and-forth motion. Do not force the floss or snap it into place. Curve the floss into a C-Shape against one tooth and then the other.

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