

Top tips for taking care of your family's oral health this Dental Health Month

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**August is
Dental Health Month**

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In the grand scheme of your overall health, it can sometimes be easy to overlook your oral hygiene. Indeed, the more strikingly obvious factors that make up your general wellbeing - blood pressure, weight, mental wellbeing and so forth - can often put our pearly whites in the proverbial shade.

Have you ever considered how important your oral hygiene is with regards to your all-around wellbeing? By keeping your teeth and gums in great shape, you're laying the foundation for your overall health, starting you off on the right foot from the moment you pick up a toothbrush in the morning, right through to when you clean them last thing at night.

Dental Health Month is taking place in August, and has been designed to put a shine back on Australia's smile. This article will help you discover the importance of proper dental hygiene, from correct brushing technique through to flossing lessons - for the grown-ups as well as the kids! What's more, we'll go over what food and drinks you should only enjoy in moderation to keep your teeth in tip-top condition - and lots more!

Brushing your teeth

As a general rule, you should brush your teeth at least twice a day - ideally, in the morning and just before you retire to bed.

The general idea behind brushing your teeth regularly is to clear your mouth of tiny segments of food and other substances that may have built up in between cleans. If left to rest, such food could become stuck to the teeth, allowing bacteria to multiply. This spells bad news for your oral hygiene - your breath may begin to smell, plaque will build-up and, if left neglected, the risk of developing gum disease and other infection rises significantly.

- Adults

To correctly brush your teeth, ensure that you are using toothpaste as recommended by the Australian Dental Association. Gripping your toothbrush in your dominant hand, try to tilt the bristle tips to a 45 degree angle along the gum line. Then, use short, circular strokes to gently cover all sides of the tooth surface, including the front, back and top. Delve into as many nooks and crannies as you can, before rinsing with cold water. Additionally, brushing the tongue can help keep the mouth clean by ridding it of bacteria - this can freshen the breath, too!

- Children

It goes without saying that it is of paramount importance that young children are taught good oral hygiene techniques as early as possible. Of course, very young children aren't yet capable of brushing by themselves, so you can do it for them. As a general guide, as soon as your little one has learned how to tie his or her shoelaces, they are fully able to use a toothbrush effectively.

Sometimes, children won't want to clean their teeth, for a great raft of reasons. However, there are a number of good quality, child-friendly toothpastes on the market that can make things a little easier for everyone since adult toothpaste may taste a little too strong for tiny palates! When you feel that it's time for your children to graduate to proper toothpaste, gently wean them off the child variety.

How to floss

Many people believe that the act of flossing is simply undertaken to remove stubborn pieces of food caught between the teeth. Of course, it does serve this purpose, but it's also an excellent weapon in the fight against legion of oral conditions. This is because, while your toothbrush will take care of the majority of cleaning, even the most advanced models won't be able to reach absolutely everywhere. For this reason, flossing is employed keep plaque levels between the teeth to an absolute minimum. Here's how to do it properly:

Which finger are you most comfortable flossing with? For most, it's the index or middle finger, so wrap one end of the floss around it, before taking the loose end and putting it around the corresponding finger on the other hand. Keep the floss taut, and using a sawing action, softly ease it between your teeth, slowly making your way to the gum line. As soon as you've reached the gum, wrap the line around the tooth and move it up and down the entirety of it length until you've removed the plaque. Repeat this until you have completed the process for each and every one of them.

Food and drink you should enjoy in moderation

Oral hygiene does not begin and end with brushing and flossing. The food and drink that we put in our mouths throughout the day can affect our teeth and gums in a number of different ways - and some of them are detrimental. Let's take a look at what we should only have in moderation if we want our mouths to remain picture of health:

- Chocolate

It will come as a surprise to no one that chocolate is not your teeth's best friend. This is predominantly because it contains large amounts of sugar and is sticky - all-round bad news. Why? Well firstly, the adhesiveness of chocolate means that its particles will cling to your teeth, making them difficult to remove. Over time, these particles form into plaque, and in that plaque are legions of bacteria just waiting to react with the sugar in chocolate. The bacteria produce acid, which work away at the tooth's enamel, creating dreaded cavities.

- Potato chips / crisps

When potato chips are chewed, their starchy particles stick to the teeth. These particles always seem to manage to find their way into nooks and crannies that other foods don't, which can be difficult to reach during brushing and flossing. Just as with chocolate, the neglected remains of potato chips can turn into plaque and eventually can lead to cavities.

- Soft drinks

Soft drinks are bursting with sugar – and some are highly acidic before they've even entered the mouth. This means that soft drinks start eating away at the tooth enamel as soon as you take a swig, softening it. The softened enamel means your teeth are more porous which means they are more susceptible to the sugar and acid in soft drinks, resulting again in cavities.

How often should you visit your dentist?

It is recommended by Australian dentists that you and your family head to your dentist once every six months, so that they can quickly and efficiently spot any problems as soon as possible. What's more, any pre-existing conditions will be examined, and your teeth will undergo a professional clean - so you can keep smiling!

