

**NATIONAL ORAL HEALTH MONTH**

# **HEALTHY TEETH, HEALTHY LIFE!**

Take care of your oral health!



# ORAL HEALTH

## INFORMATION FOR ADULTS



# FLOSSING AND BRUSHING

## Oral Health and Adults

Oral health is important for people of all ages. Oral health is linked to overall health and can impact physical, psychological, financial, and social well-being. A healthy mouth helps people enjoy their food, chew better, eat well, maintain fresh breath, and avoid pain and tooth loss. With good oral hygiene and regular visits to the dentist, you can maintain your oral health for years.



January 2023

## Brushing

Brushing removes dental plaque, which is a sticky, colorless film of bacteria on tooth surfaces. If plaque is not removed, some of it can harden below the gumline and irritate the gums.

## Flossing

Flossing removes dental plaque between teeth where a toothbrush can't reach. If not removed, dental plaque can build up and cause tooth decay and gum disease.

- Follow the step-by-step guide (see next page).
- Use tools that might make flossing easier (see page 4).
- Floss regularly.

### What Type of Toothbrush?

- Use a soft bristle brush that is small enough to reach all areas of your mouth.

### What Type of Floss?

- Waxed, unwaxed, flavored, or plain floss all do the same thing.

### What if It's Hard to Floss?

- If it's hard to floss, there are flossing tools that can help.

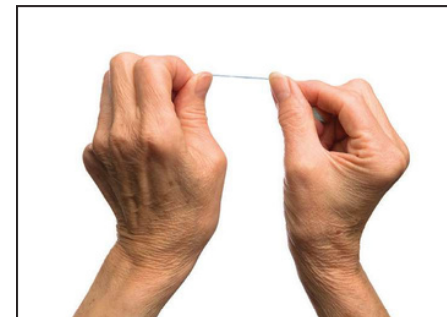
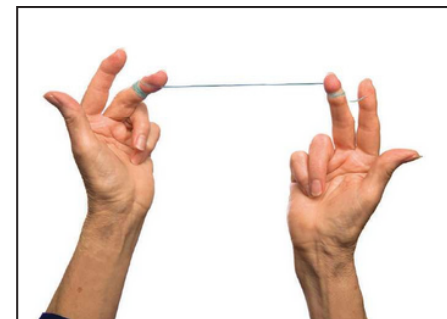


Keep your dentures clean and free from food and drinks that can cause stains or bad breath. Brush dentures every day with a denture-care product, and soak them in water or a denture-cleansing liquid at night. Be sure to leave them out of your mouth while you sleep to prevent sore gums.

## Flossing Step-by-Step

Follow these steps to floss your teeth:

- Use a string of floss about one foot long. Wrap that piece around the middle finger of each hand.
- Grip the floss between the thumb and index finger of each hand.
- Ease the floss gently between the teeth until it reaches the gumline. Don't "snap" or force the floss into place—as it could harm the gums.
- Curve the floss like the letter "C" around each tooth, keeping in contact with the side of the tooth. Slide the floss up and down under the gum.
- Do this for both sides of every tooth, one side at a time. Adjust the floss a little as you move from tooth to tooth so that the floss is clean for each one.
- Be sure to floss all teeth, including the backs of the last teeth on each side.
- Use flossing tools if needed (see next page).





## Flossing Tools



### Floss holder

A small, plastic tool with a handle that holds a piece of floss. You do not need to wrap the floss around your fingers when you use this tool.



### Floss threader

A plastic loop that helps pass floss through hard-to-reach or tight spaces, such as between crowded teeth, dental crowns and caps, or under dental bridges.



### Water flosser

A device that sprays pulsing water between teeth.



### Interdental brush

A very small (360°) brush with a handle that is shaped like a cylinder, tube, or pine tree. It can be used to clean between your teeth. It is also called a proxy brush.

## Brushing Your Teeth

To keep your teeth healthy, it is important to remove the sticky dental plaque and bacteria (germs) that can cause tooth decay and gum disease.

- **Gum disease**—If plaque is not removed, it will irritate the gums, which can become red, swollen, and may bleed easily. These are signs of gingivitis. Gingivitis is a mild form of gum disease, and you can usually reverse it with daily brushing and flossing. Severe or untreated gum disease can cause tooth loss. If there are areas in your mouth where your gums have pulled away from the teeth (called gum recession), the exposed tooth roots can decay as well.
- **Tooth decay (cavities)**—Even teeth that already have fillings are at risk for tooth decay. Bacteria in plaque can get underneath a chipped or broken filling and cause new decay.

### Brushing Tips

- Use toothpaste with fluoride. Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral that protects teeth from cavities (tooth decay). It works by strengthening the tooth's hard outer surface, called enamel, to resist cavities.
- Angle the bristles toward the gumline, so that they clean between the gums and teeth.
- Brush gently using small, circular motions. Do not scrub hard back and forth.
- Brush all sides of each tooth.
- Brush your tongue to remove bacteria and help maintain fresh breath.





## Visiting the Dentist

You should have regular dental appointments and check-ups. Professional cleanings are just as important as brushing and flossing at home. Regular exams can identify problems early, before they cause unnecessary pain or infection. Remember, preventive visits are painless and can help you avoid more costly treatment. For your dental visit, make sure to bring a list of your current medicines, known allergies, and any insurance or billing information.

At these visits, the dentist or dental hygienist will review your medical history and suggest an oral hygiene routine that may make it easier for you. The dentist may also prescribe a special toothpaste or mouthwash to help prevent tooth decay, or mouthwash to fight germs that cause gum disease. Follow the dental provider's instructions for use.

For information on finding free or low-cost dental care, visit:

- [findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov](https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov)
- [nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/finding-dental-care](https://nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/finding-dental-care)

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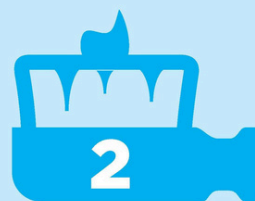


# FLUORIDE: CAVITY FIGHTER

Children can maintain good oral health in 4 ways:



**Drink water  
that has fluoride**



**Brush twice  
a day with the right  
amount of fluoridated  
toothpaste**



**Eat a healthy diet,  
limiting sweet drinks,  
sticky candies,  
and snacks**



**Talk to your dentist  
or doctor about  
fluoride treatments**

CAMPAIGN FOR  
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Fluoride is an important mineral  
for all children. Talk to your  
doctor or dentist to learn more.



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# How Community Water Fluoridation Prevents Tooth Decay

## For children



When children are young **fluoride that is swallowed enters the bloodstream.**



It **combines with calcium and phosphate** as the tooth is formed under the gums.



**These teeth are more resistant to decay** throughout childhood and the teenage years.

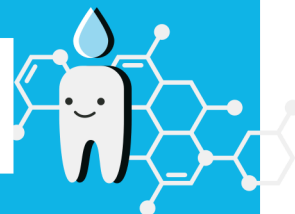


## For people of all ages



Fluoride in beverages and foods **mixes with the saliva.**

Saliva **neutralizes acid produced by bacteria on teeth.**



**the fluoride heals the teeth and protects them from further decay.**



[ILikeMyTeeth.org](http://ILikeMyTeeth.org)

CAMPAIGN FOR  
**DENTAL HEALTH**  
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# Oral Health and Diabetes

### How Are Diabetes and Oral Health Linked?

People with diabetes are at greater risk for oral health problems, like gum disease and tooth decay. Gum disease can also be a warning sign for diabetes. To lower risk for oral health problems, it is important to control blood sugar and practice good oral health habits. If you have diabetes, discuss any special care you may need with both your dentist and primary health care professional (physician, nurse practitioner, physician assistant).

### What Are Common Oral Health Problems Related to Diabetes?

Diabetes can make it hard for your body to fight off infection. This means you may be at higher risk for some of these problems:

- *Gum Disease (Periodontitis)* occurs

when tartar builds up and contributes to infections deep in your gums. It can lead to loss of tissue, bone, and teeth and increases your risk for other serious health problems, like heart attack or stroke.

- *Oral Thrush* can cause uncomfortable creamy white patches in your mouth or small white cracks at the corners of your mouth.
- *Dry Mouth* can cause soreness, ulcers, infections, and cavities. Dry mouth may be caused by medicines for high blood pressure, depression, or other health problems.



### What Are Warning Signs of Oral Health Problems Related to Diabetes?

- Red, swollen, or tender gums or other pain in your mouth
- Bleeding while brushing, flossing, or eating
- Loose or separating teeth
- Sores in your mouth
- Bad breath, bad taste in mouth, or loss of taste
- White patches in the mouth
- A sticky, dry feeling in the mouth

### How Are Oral Health Problems Diagnosed?

Oral health problems may be diagnosed after your mouth, teeth, gums, and tongue are examined. X-rays of your mouth may also help diagnose problems. If you are having any other problems related to your diabetes, talk with your primary health care professional.



# Oral Health and Diabetes

### How Are These Problems Treated?

- Gum disease is treated by removing tartar and bacteria from your teeth and gums during a deep cleaning.
- You may be prescribed special medicines such as prescription mouthwash, gel, or oral antibiotics.
- If gum disease is more serious, dental surgery may be needed.
- Your medicines may be changed if they cause dry mouth.
- Your primary health care professional may work with you to develop diet and exercise habits that help you improve your diabetes and blood sugar levels.
- Quit smoking and tobacco use.
- Remove and clean dentures daily if you wear them.
- Discuss any oral health concerns with your dentist or primary health care professional.
- Discuss any medicines you are taking with both your dentist and primary health care professional.

### Questions for My Primary Health Care Professional

- Will you examine my mouth at my primary health visits?
- You're not a dentist—why is it important for you to examine my mouth?
- What is my risk for gum disease?
- Should I tell my dentist that I have diabetes?
- Will the medicines I take give me dry mouth?
- How can I better control my diabetes?

### How Can I Prevent These Complications if I Have Diabetes?

- Partner with your primary health care professional to keep your blood sugar under control.
- Take care of your mouth by brushing twice a day, flossing once a day, and getting dental check-ups twice a year.

### For More Information

- American Diabetes Association: [www.diabetes.org/living-with-diabetes/treatment-and-care/oral-health-and-hygiene/diabetes-and-oral-health.html](http://www.diabetes.org/living-with-diabetes/treatment-and-care/oral-health-and-hygiene/diabetes-and-oral-health.html)
- American College of Physicians: [www.acponline.org/cgi-bin/cpph.cgi?CPP3003\\_Living\\_With\\_Diabetes\\_2014.pdf](http://www.acponline.org/cgi-bin/cpph.cgi?CPP3003_Living_With_Diabetes_2014.pdf)
- American Dental Association: [www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/d/diabetes](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/d/diabetes)

### Notes:

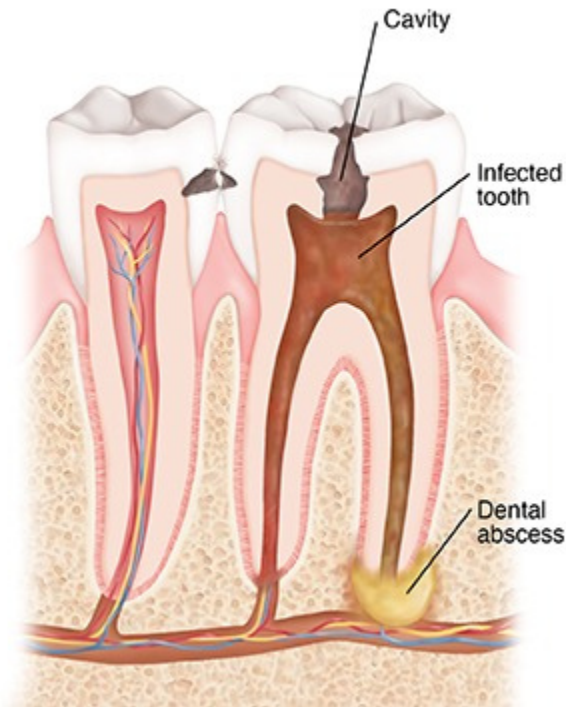


# Veterans Health Library

*Helping Veterans stay well and well-informed*

## Dental Abscess

*An abscess is a sac of fluid (pus). A dental abscess forms when a tooth or the tissue around it becomes infected with bacteria. The bacteria can enter through a cavity or a crack in a tooth. It can also infect the gum tissue or bone around a tooth. An untreated abscess can cause the loss of the tooth. It can even spread to other parts of the body and become life-threatening.*



## Symptoms of a dental abscess

*Symptoms include:*

- *A toothache, often severe.*
- *Tooth pain with heat, cold, or pressure.*
- *Red gums.*
- *Pain in the gums, cheek, or jaw.*
- *Bad breath or a bitter taste in the mouth.*
- *Trouble swallowing or opening the mouth.*
- *A fever.*
- *Swollen or enlarged neck glands.*



# **Diagnosing a dental abscess**

*The dentist will ask about your symptoms and check your teeth and gums. You will be told if you need any tests. This includes dental X-rays.*

## **Treating a dental abscess**

*Treatments for a dental abscess may include:*

- *Antibiotic medicines. These treat the underlying infection.*
- *Pain relievers. These help you feel more comfortable. Your dentist or doctor may prescribe a medicine for you. Or you may use over-the-counter pain relievers, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, unless another pain medicine was prescribed. Talk with your doctor before using these medicines if you have chronic liver or kidney disease. Also talk with your doctor if you've had a stomach ulcer or gastrointestinal (GI) bleeding.*
- *Warm saltwater rinses. These can soothe mild pain and help clear away pus.*
- *Root canal surgery. This may be done if needed to save the tooth. With a root canal, the infected part of the tooth is removed. A special substance is then used to fill the empty space in the tooth.*
- *Draining the abscess. This may be done if needed. Cuts (incisions) are made to let the infected material drain from the tooth.*
- *Removing the tooth. This is done in cases of severe infection that can't be treated another way.*

*You may need to be admitted to a hospital if the infection is severe, has spread, or doesn't respond to treatment.*

## **When to get medical advice**

*Contact your dentist or doctor right away if you have:*

- *A fever of 100.4°F ( 38°C) or higher, or as directed by your doctor or dentist.*
- *More pain, redness, drainage, or swelling in the treated area.*
- *Face or jawbone swelling.*
- *Pain that can't be controlled with medicines.*
- *Pus draining from the tooth.*

## **Call 911**

*Call 911 if you have:*

- *Unusual drowsiness or confusion.*
- *Weakness or fainting.*

- *A headache or stiff neck.*
- *Trouble swallowing, breathing, or opening your mouth.*
- *Swollen eyelids or vision problems.*

## ***Preventing dental abscess***

*To prevent another abscess in the future, keep your teeth clean and healthy. Brush twice a day and floss at least once daily. See your dentist for regular exams and tooth cleanings. Limit or avoid sugary foods and drinks that can lead to tooth decay. If your teeth experience any trauma, see your dentist as soon as you can.*

[www.veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov](http://www.veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov)