

# Preventive Dentistry

How to make your smile last.

**When you were a kid, taking care of your dental health was pretty easy. You brushed regularly, gave your baby teeth to the tooth fairy and visited your dentist every six months. But adult dental problems aren't the same as children's dental problems. Here are some of the most common dental problems with some tips to help prevent them.**



## Gum Disease

Symptoms of gum disease may include, shiny, red, puffy or sore gums, a change in gum colour, gums that bleed every time you brush, chronic bad breath, a metallic taste in your mouth, or gums that are red around the base of teeth. The good news is that gum disease is almost always preventable.

Home prevention should include twice-a-day gentle brushing and flossing between the teeth and gumline. For best results floss first, then brush. Pay attention to the areas where your teeth and gums meet. Clean every surface of every tooth — the chewing surface, the cheek side and the tongue side.

Brush at a 45-degree angle to your teeth. Direct the bristles to where your gums and teeth meet. Use a gentle, circular, massaging motion, up and down. Don't "rush your brush." A thorough brushing should take at least two or three minutes. Daily flossing removes plaque from areas your toothbrush can't reach, preventing the build-up of tartar along and under your gums.

The Ontario Dental Association recommends that frequency of dental visits be based on individual patient needs. It advises, however, that a minimum of twice yearly visits are in the best interest of the oral health of the majority of patients in Ontario. Your dentist can spot gum disease in the early stages, even before you notice any symptoms. Your dental team will help clean your teeth to remove built-up tartar before it causes gum disease.

## Tooth Decay

Two cavity problems are unique to adults: root cavities and cavities at the edges of fillings. You can help prevent cavities in three easy steps: brush and floss regularly; eat a balanced diet and avoid sweets. Use a fluoride toothpaste recognized by the Canadian Dental Association, and ask your dentist if a fluoride treatment would be a good idea.

## Smoking

If you smoke, you may be causing trouble for your teeth and gums. Smoking kills cells inside your mouth. Smoking can

make your mouth more susceptible to infections and is one of the leading causes of oral cancer. Smoking can also discolour teeth and composite restorations.

Smokers should be on the lookout for early signs of trouble such as white or red patches in the mouth, unexplainable bleeding, soreness or numbness. See your dentist if any of these signs occur.

## Tension and Grinding

Many people clench or grind their teeth, especially during sleep — this is called bruxism. Over a long period of time, bruxism can wear down tooth surfaces. The main cause is muscle tension brought on by stress.

To help prevent grinding, simply try and relax. Become more conscious of when you clench your jaw and avoid biting on pencils and pens. Your dentist may be able to help you with a custom-fitted mouthguard or can recommend relaxation exercises to help you deal with stress.

## Food for Thought ... and Healthier Teeth

A balanced, nutritious diet is good for your general health as well as your dental health. Without the right nutrients, your teeth and gums can become more susceptible to decay and gum disease. Sugar is one of the main causes of dental problems. The average Canadian eats the equivalent of 40 kg (88 lb) of sugar each year. Here are a few ways to reduce your sugar intake, and help your teeth at the same time.

- Try to choose sugar-free snacks such as milk, fruit, vegetables, nuts, plain yogurt, sunflower or pumpkin seeds, cheese, melba toast, juice and salads.
- Add less sugar to your coffee or tea or try sugar substitutes. Try to avoid sugar-sweetened soft drinks and look for fruit juices and drinks with no added sugar.
- Pay attention to the list of ingredients when you are grocery shopping. Honey, molasses, liquid invert sugar, glucose, and fructose are all types of sugar.
- When you do eat sweets, there are things you can do to

avoid harming your teeth: avoid sticky sweets that cling to your teeth and are harder to brush away; eat sweets with a meal, not as a snack, to improve the flow of saliva, which helps wash away and dilute sugar; and carry a travel-size toothbrush and use it after eating sweets.

- If you can't brush, at least rinse your mouth with water or eat a fibrous fruit such as an apple or raw vegetables. Or chew a piece of sugarless gum. Trident gum, which is the first chewing gum to be recognized by the Canadian Dental Association, contains Dentec™ (Xylitol). Xylitol is a naturally occurring sweetener that is found in plants, in fruits, such as raisins and strawberries and in vegetables such as lettuce, onions and carrots.

## Why Should I Visit the Dentist?

Regular checkups are important for cleaning, the detection of cavities and periodontal examination. Plaque and tartar can build up in areas that are not easily reached through home maintenance. These can be removed during a dental check-up to prevent cavities and gum disease.

While semi-annual visits are sufficient for cleaning and detection of cavities, patients' needs do vary and patients should discuss the frequency of visits with their dentist.

Patients should also contact their dentist immediately, if their gums bleed, teeth become hypersensitive to temperature or pressure, or in the event of tooth pain or abscess.

## New Treatment Options

New materials enable less invasive and less expensive treatment for cosmetic defects, replacement of teeth and improved chewing ability.

New techniques for veneering for esthetic purposes are also available, as well as implants to replace missing teeth. Some dental offices are also starting to offer technologies such as Electronic Dental Anesthesia (EDA) and Virtual Reality Vision to make patients feel more comfortable during their dental visits.

**Ask your dentist about any alternatives to the recommended treatment options.**