

# Ageless Smiles

A Guide to Dental Health



**Delta Dental of Idaho**  
Partnering for a lifetime of dental health

# The Mouth/Body Connection

Ninety percent of health conditions, such as diabetes, vitamin imbalances, and auto-immune diseases, show symptoms in the mouth. A dentist can tell a lot about your overall health by how your mouth looks. Likewise, diseases in the mouth, mostly gum diseases, may be linked to pneumonia, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. You cannot have good health without good dental health.

**Taking care of your teeth and gums is as much about your overall health as your dental health.**

## Keys to Dental Health

Twice Daily Brushing

Daily Flossing

Good Nutrition

Treating a Dry Mouth

Regular Self Oral Exams

Regular Dental Visits

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## Twice Daily Brushing

It's important to brush at least twice a day, morning and night. If your mouth is dry, brushing three times a day is recommended.

### Choosing The Right Toothbrush For You:

If gripping the small handle of a toothbrush is difficult, adapt a regular toothbrush by sliding a bicycle grip onto the handle, wrapping the handle with bubble wrap and tape, or cutting a small slit in a tennis ball and sliding the handle into the ball.



- If you have lost some fine motor skills, try a toothbrush with a bigger bristle head, or try an electric toothbrush that rotates for you.
- If your mouth is small and you have trouble reaching to the back of your mouth, try a child-size toothbrush.
- Always use soft bristle brushes. Harder bristles can damage your gums and teeth.
- Replace your toothbrush at least every 3 months, or after a contagious illness.

## Choosing the Right Toothpaste

Fluoride is as important for adults as it is for kids. Fluoride bonds to teeth and strengthens against cavities.

If your gums have receded, you are more susceptible to cavities because the tooth's root surfaces are exposed. You may benefit from a prescription-strength fluoride toothpaste. Ask your dentist or physician.

## How to Brush Your Teeth:

Remove any partial dentures before you brush.

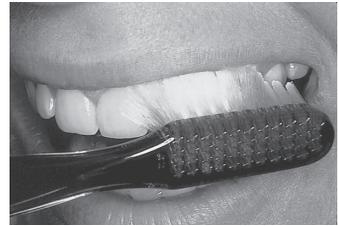
Brush for two minutes at a time, using a toothpaste with fluoride.

Make sure to brush all of your teeth. Use small circular brush strokes and **angle the bristles to clean where your gums and teeth meet.** →

When using an electric brush, hold the bristles angled into the gums. Let the brush head move on its own, doing the work for you.

Gently **brush your tongue.** →

Rinse vigorously with water or a non-alcohol mouthwash to help remove any remaining debris.



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## Dentures and Partials:

Using a mild dishwashing liquid, a denture brush, or soft bristled toothbrush, brush your dentures or partials as often as your teeth.

Soak your dentures or partials in a denture cleanser solution any time you are not wearing them. Do not place in hot water or let them dry out.

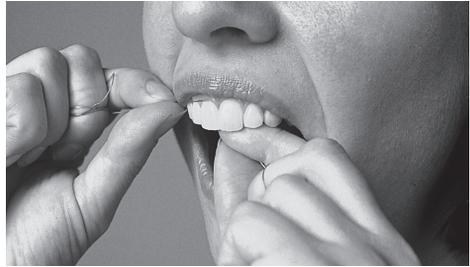
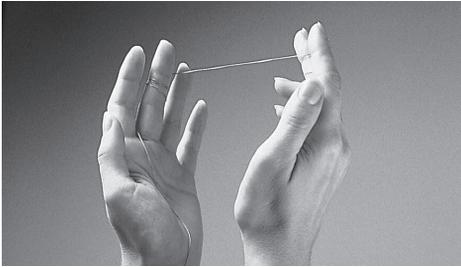
Always remove your dentures or partials at night to help prevent infections and the growth of yeast.

# Daily Flossing

When caring for your teeth, it is important to clean the areas between your teeth and under your gums.

## How To Floss:

Wrap floss around your middle fingers. Use your index finger and thumb to guide the floss between the teeth. Make sure to slide the floss against the sides of each tooth and go under the gums slightly to scoop up plaque that collects there.



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## Choosing the Right Floss:

- Floss can shred and break if teeth are tight or fillings are rough. Try using a silk or satin floss.
- If you find it difficult to use the regular floss try:



**Tapered dental brushes \***



**Floss holder \***

- The tapered dental brushes or toothpicks are also good to use if you have spaces between your teeth where food collects.

\* Look for these in stores that sell floss

# Good Nutrition

## Eating a Nutrient-Rich Diet is Essential to a Healthy Mouth:

Vitamin D and calcium are especially important in helping to prevent tooth loss, including from osteoporosis. Vitamin D is found in fortified milk and cereals, as well as fatty fish like salmon, mackerel and tuna. Calcium is found in dairy products and also in dark green, leafy vegetables, beans, almonds and sesame seeds.

Vitamin C can help protect against bacterial infections in the gums. Most fruits, citrus juices, and many vegetables contain vitamin C.

## It's Not Just What You Eat, But How Often:

Each time you eat or drink anything other than water, it interacts with the bacteria in your mouth, bathing your teeth in acid for 20 minutes or more. Sugary or carbohydrate-rich foods such as hard candy, cookies, cakes, licorice, raisins, prunes, crackers, chips, and pretzels stick to the teeth and can cause cavities.

Instead, choose snacks like cheese, fresh fruit, vegetables, or nuts. If your health requires you to snack often, get into the habit of vigorously rinsing with water after each snack. When you want a sweet treat, it is best to eat it with a meal, when the body is producing more saliva. Saliva helps wash away food and neutralize acids before they attack your teeth.



## A Dry Mouth:

If your mouth often feels dry, you are more prone to cavities because you lack the saliva necessary to wash away food and keep the mouth neutralized. Drinking water with meals and rinsing vigorously after eating can help. If you can, brush after each meal or snack.

Many prescriptions and over-the-counter medications can cause your mouth to be dry. Examples are drugs that treat:

- Allergies
- Anxiety
- Depression
- High Blood Pressure
- Incontinence
- Pain
- Parkinson's Disease

To combat dry mouth, drink water throughout the day. Avoid alcoholic, caffeinated, and sugary drinks. Also avoid mouth rinses that contain alcohol. Chew sugarless gum or mints to stimulate saliva flow. If this doesn't help, talk to your dentist or physician about saliva aids.

# Regular Self Oral Exams

Every couple of weeks, look and feel for changes in your teeth and gums. When examining your mouth:

- Make sure to use good lighting. Consider using a flashlight.
- Look after brushing and flossing. Remove all partials or dentures.
- Feel your cheeks and lips, inside and out, with clean fingers. Stick out your tongue and look at all sides of the tongue and underneath the tongue. Check the roof of your mouth.
- Push on your gums and look for any signs of bleeding and/or pus. Push on your teeth to see if any are loose.

**Oral cancer is often painless in the early stages.**

## See a Dentist Soon if You Notice:

- Changes in the color or feel of your gums, lips, inside cheeks, roof of the mouth, or tongue. These may indicate conditions such as a vitamin deficiency, yeast infection, or oral cancer.
- Any lumps, thick or rough patches, or red or white spots that last longer than two weeks, even if they are small. Don't wait!
- Bleeding gums if you are regularly brushing and flossing.
- Changes in the color of a single tooth, or black, brown or green staining of teeth along the gum line.
- A loose tooth, or pus coming from the gums or around the teeth (i.e. an infection).
- A sudden change in how your dentures or partials fit.
- Difficulty swallowing or speaking, or a persistent feeling of something caught in your throat.
- Numb or painful areas, or difficulty chewing or moving your tongue.

## Regular Dental Visits

Regular dental cleanings are key to good dental health. Seeing your dentist regularly can also help in managing other health conditions like heart disease, pneumonia, and diabetes.

A dentist that knows your mouth can watch for changes and address needs early. Many times, catching a problem early will keep you out of pain and be less expensive. Be sure to make a dentist part of your health care team!



**If you would like information about dentists in your area, including dentists that accept Medicaid, call the Idaho Care Line toll-free by dialing 211.**

Feel free to contact us for more information:

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