

# brush up on good health

**A** wise person once said, “You don’t **have** to brush your teeth — just the ones you want to keep.” Nowadays, we know that oral hygiene is not only about keeping your teeth, but also about maintaining your **overall** health! If your eyes are considered *the windows to the soul*, then your mouth can be considered *a window to your wellbeing*.

Did you know that signs of a disease may first appear in your mouth? **It’s true! Diabetes, osteoporosis, HIV/AIDs, anemia, rheumatoid arthritis, and Sjögren’s syndrome can all display tell-tale symptoms in the gums, tongue and teeth.**

**B**y not keeping your mouth healthy, you may be susceptible to gum disease which allows bacteria to enter the blood stream and wreak havoc elsewhere in your body. Saliva is a key defense against bacteria and viruses that may linger in your mouth, but good oral health habits, such as brushing and flossing daily – along with routine visits to your dentist, will manage the natural bacteria that forms in the mouth and keep it from spreading.

**Periodontitis – a serious gum infection that if left untreated, can be associated with many severe conditions including:**

- Tooth loss
- Cardiovascular disease
- Stroke
- Bacterial pneumonia
- Ulcers
- Osteoporosis

**Women in particular** should pay attention to dental hygiene, especially when pregnant or thinking about pregnancy, as gum disease has been linked to premature birth and other complications. Certain medications, including oral contraceptives, put users at a higher risk for periodontitis as well.

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**Below are some simple guidelines for proper brushing and flossing according to the American Dental Association:**

#### For brushing your teeth:

- ☞ Place your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle against the gums.
- ☞ Move the brush back and forth gently in short (tooth-wide) strokes.
- ☞ Brush the outer tooth surfaces, the inner tooth surfaces, and the chewing surfaces of the teeth.
- ☞ Use the “toe” of the brush to clean the inside surfaces of the front teeth, using a gentle up-and-down stroke.
- ☞ Brush your tongue to remove bacteria and freshen your breath.
- ☞ A thorough cleaning should take two to three minutes.

#### For flossing:

- ☞ Break off about 18 inches of floss and wind most of it around one of your middle fingers. Wind the remaining floss around the same finger of the opposite hand. This finger will collect the used portions of floss. Hold the floss tightly between your thumbs and forefingers.
- ☞ Guide the floss between your teeth using a gentle rubbing motion. Never snap the floss into the gums.
- ☞ When the floss reaches the gum line, curve it into a ‘C’ shape against one tooth. Gently slide it into the space between the gum and the tooth.
- ☞ Hold the floss tightly against the tooth. Gently rub the side of the tooth, moving the floss away from the gum with up and down motions.
- ☞ Repeat this method on the rest of your teeth.
- ☞ Don’t forget the back side of your last tooth!

Sources: MayoClinic.com • American Dental Association • Perio.org

*Brush Up on Your Health* by using the checklist below to brighten your smile:

- See your dentist regularly – only professionals can remove tartar
  - Brush and floss daily
  - Opt for soft or medium bristle toothbrushes to protect enamel
  - Replace toothbrushes every two months
  - Quit smoking
  - Limit sugar and carbohydrates
  - Balance enamel-eroding acids like red wine with low-fat dairy products
- July 9<sup>th</sup> is **Dental Awareness Day**. Join your Spirit of Women hospital as we celebrate and recognize your dental health!

