

Taking Care of Your Teeth

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Having good teeth has many advantages. It contributes to good health, good looks, good speech, and good eating.¹ Today we want to talk about how to take care of your teeth so that you can enjoy all the benefits of having good teeth—all of your life.



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You need strong teeth to eat different kinds of food. Different foods are important for health. If your teeth are loose and hurting it will be difficult to bite and chew your food.



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One way to have good strong teeth is to eat healthy foods. The best foods are the ones that you grow or raise yourself. If you eat different foods throughout the week it helps your body as well as your teeth and gums to stay strong and healthy.



©Bernhard Heiser/asiaphoto.de

Sweet foods, especially the kind you buy from the store, including fizzy drinks like Coca-Cola or Fanta, can help germs make holes in the teeth called cavities. Sugary drinks are also bad for the gums.



©Wildwood Lifestyle Center

Babies also need good food to help them develop their first teeth. Babies' mouths are made for breastfeeding. Breast milk is the perfect food for babies; it helps their teeth to grow and stay strong.



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Sweet tea, sugar water or fruit juice can easily make holes in the child's teeth.² Even when a child starts drinking from a cup, do not sweeten the drinks; let the child learn to enjoy drinks that are not sweet. Water is one of the best drinks for children; and it is also good for the teeth.



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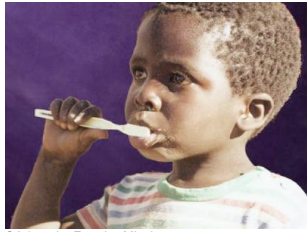
If you don't clean your teeth properly after eating, the food that is left on your teeth can hurt the teeth as well as the gums near them.



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Little bits of food stay longer in places that are hidden and hard to get to. This is where both tooth and gum problems start.

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To prevent problems you must take special care to keep these hidden places clean. It is best to clean your teeth right after each meal, but you must clean them at least once a day.



©Bill Dull

What's the best way to clean your teeth?



©Daniel White

Use a soft brush to clean your teeth. If you buy one from the store, be sure it says **soft** on the package. If you can't buy a brush, you can make a brush yourself.



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Use a small branch, young bamboo, strong grass or the skin from sugar cane. Cut a piece that is still green and soft. Chew one end to make it stringy like a brush. You can sharpen the other end to clean between the teeth.



©Daniel White

Whatever kind of brush you use, be sure to clean your back teeth as well as your front teeth.



©Daniel White

Place the brush against the gums as you see it in this picture (at a 45-degree angle).



©Daniel White

Move the brush back and forth gently in short (tooth-wide) movements. Be sure to brush the outside, inside, and the chewing side of all the teeth.



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Use the top end of the brush to clean the inside of the front teeth, gently up and down.³ A thorough brushing should take at least 3 minutes.

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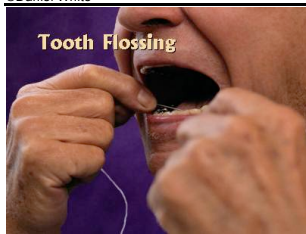
Toothpaste is not necessary. But if you can buy toothpaste it is helpful and refreshing. Toothpastes with fluoride help keep teeth stronger.



Even charcoal or just plain water can be used with the toothbrush.⁴

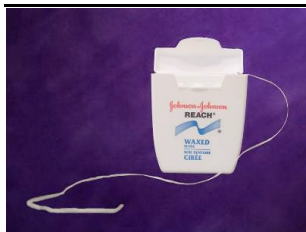


When your teeth are clean, rinse away the loose pieces of food.



Flossing the teeth is another important part of having a healthy mouth.

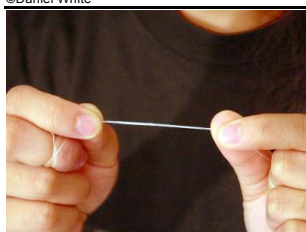
Brushing gets rid of the acid on the big sides of the teeth, but not between them. Flossing removes this acid from between the teeth.



Dental floss or some kind of strong thread is the best way to clean in these difficult to reach areas.



Here's how you do it. Take about 18" (45 cm) of floss. Wrap it around the middle finger on each hand.



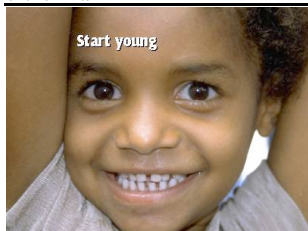
Use both thumbs and pointing (index) fingers to pull the floss tight leaving about 3 inches (8 cm) between them.

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Starting with the upper teeth, gently slide the floss between the two front teeth. Gently slide the floss up to the level of the gums and then down again. Do this 2-3 times. Now you're ready to go to the next tooth. Be sure to floss between all the teeth.



Start young

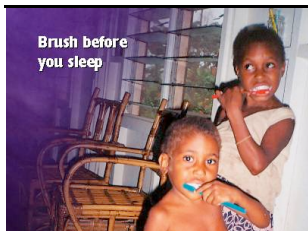
©Diana Barnett "FACES OF TOMORROW"

When should you start flossing your children's teeth? As soon as their teeth touch each other and you can no longer brush between them.⁵



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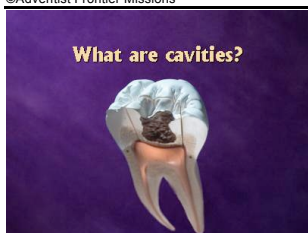
Remember, small children cannot clean their own teeth properly. It only takes a few minutes for you to help them. With the child on a chair or in your lap, let them tilt their head back slightly. Don't use toothpaste, as young children swallow most of it.⁶



Brush before you sleep

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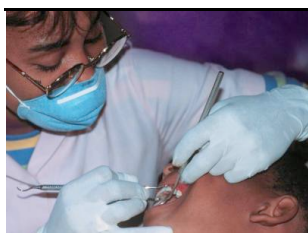
It is important to brush and floss before bedtime. If you don't get rid of the food and acid that causes cavities, it has all night to harm the teeth.⁷



What are cavities?

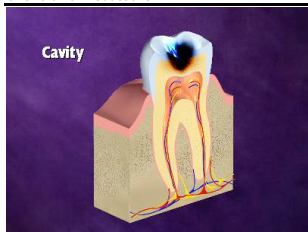
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'Cavities' are holes in the teeth that are made by an infection called **tooth decay**. If you have a black spot on your tooth, there might be a cavity. If that tooth hurts some of the time, such as when you eat, drink, or breathe cold air, it probably has a hole in it. You will get holes in your teeth if you do not clean your teeth, especially if you eat sweet food.



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If you see a hole starting or feel a tooth hurting you, get help right away. A dental worker knows how to fill the hole so you can keep that tooth. Don't wait, or the pain will just get worse.



Cavity

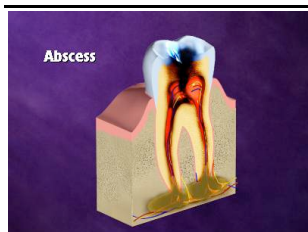
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If you don't fill a hole, it will grow bigger and deeper.



When the decay touches the nerve inside the tooth, the pain becomes worse, even when you try to sleep.

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When infection goes into a tooth, it is called a tooth abscess. A tooth with an abscess needs treatment at once, before the infection goes into the bone.

Now let's talk about the gums.



Healthy gums fit tightly around the teeth. When gums become **infected** it is called **gum disease** (Gingivitis).⁸

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Gum Disease

- Swollen, red gums
- Gums that bleed
- Gums pulled away from teeth
- Bad breath
- Loose teeth

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How do you know if you have gum disease?⁹ You probably have gum disease if you have:

- ➔ Swollen, red gums
- ➔ Gums that bleed during brushing or eating
- ➔ Gums that have pulled away from the teeth
- ➔ Bad breath (or)
- ➔ Loose teeth



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Gum disease, like tooth decay, happens when acid stays on the teeth and gums. Germs in the mouth make this sticky acid from food, especially if it is sweet.¹⁰

The good news is that you can stop gum disease and prevent it from coming back by:



- Clean your teeth better

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Cleaning your teeth better and



- Clean your teeth better
- Strengthen your gums

©George Sedupane

Strengthening your gums.



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Even if your gums are sore and they bleed, you must still clean the teeth beside them. If more food collects on the teeth because you don't brush them, the gum infection will get even worse. The best thing to do is to get a **soft** brush and use it gently. This way you will not hurt the gums when you clean.

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Also rinse your mouth with warm salt water. First mix some salt with a cup of warm water. Take a mouthful and rinse, then spit it out. Repeat until all of the salt water is finished. Do this every time you brush your teeth. You can even do this after your gums feel better.¹¹



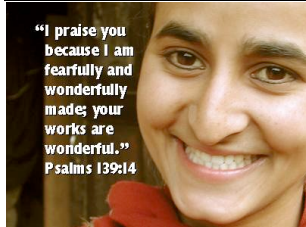
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To make your gums stronger and more able to fight the infection, eat more fresh fruits and green leafy vegetables, and fewer sugary foods from the store.



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Take good care of your teeth and those who live with you will be more likely to do the same. God designed teeth to last a lifetime. It is up to each person to care for them with a good diet, healthy habits, and good daily cleaning.



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"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful." Psalms 139:14

Teeth are a gift from God. We should thank God for the wonderful bodies He has made for us. Like David in the Bible we can say,



"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful." Psalms 139:14 NIV

1 Where There Is No Dentist, p. 1

2 Health News, Ibid., p. 3

3 American Dental Association, <http://www.ada.org/public/faq/cleaning.html>, p. 2.

4 Where There Is No Dentist, p. 5

5 Oral Hygiene for Children, p. 2, <http://www.umanitoba.ca/outreach/wisdomtooth/oral.htm>

6 Oral Hygiene for Children, p. 1, <http://www.umanitoba.ca/outreach/wisdomtooth/oral.htm>

7 Oral Hygiene for Children, p. 1, <http://www.umanitoba.ca/outreach/wisdomtooth/oral.htm>

8 Where There Is No Dentist, p. 6

9 Health News, November 20, 1998, p. 4

10 Health News, November 20, 1998, p. 4; Where There Is No Dentist, p. 7

11 Where There Is No Dentist, p. 8