



Keep Your Mouth Healthy

Simple steps to protect
your teeth and gums

Oral Health Tips

People who are pregnant

- Pregnancy can increase your risk for oral health problems. Pay special attention to your teeth and gums during this time.
- Dental treatment (such as X-rays or local anesthesia) is safe during pregnancy. Tell your provider if you are pregnant at your visit.
- Cavity-causing germs in your mouth can be passed to your newborn baby through saliva. Treat your tooth decay before your baby is born.

Parents and caregivers

- Start brushing your child's teeth with a soft-bristle toothbrush as soon as your child's first tooth comes in. Use a smear of fluoride toothpaste.
- Begin regular dental visits when the first tooth comes in, and no later than age 1.
- Ask your child's dentist about fluoride varnish and dental sealants, which are treatments to help stop cavities.

Older adults

- Adults age 65 and older are at higher risk for diseases of the mouth, including infections, cavities on the roots of the teeth, tooth loss and oral cancer.
- Dry mouth, often caused by certain medicines or oral health conditions, can lead to tooth decay or trouble eating. Drink water often and brush with fluoridated toothpaste.
- If you have dentures, remove and clean them after eating and before going to sleep.

Take care of your teeth and gums.

- Oral health means keeping your mouth healthy, which is also an important part of keeping your whole body healthy.
- Gum disease and tooth decay are common oral health issues. If untreated, they can lead to pain, infection, loss of teeth, and trouble eating and speaking.
- You can prevent many oral health issues by practicing good oral hygiene, including regular brushing and flossing.

What is gum disease?

- Gum disease is an infection of the gums that makes them swell and turn red. It can lead to tooth loss and other health problems.
- **Risk factors** for gum disease include not brushing or flossing regularly, using tobacco, or having health conditions such as diabetes.

What are signs of gum disease?

- Red, swollen or tender gums
- Bleeding when brushing, flossing or eating
- Pain when chewing and sensitivity to cold
- Loose teeth or gums that have pulled away from the teeth
- Bad breath or a bad taste that does not go away



What is tooth decay?

- Tooth decay is damage from bacteria eating away at the teeth. Over time, holes in the teeth called cavities can form.
- **Risk factors** for tooth decay include not brushing or flossing regularly, consuming foods or drinks high in sugar or starch, or eating many snacks during the day.

What are signs of tooth decay?

- Tooth discoloration
- Toothache
- Pain when biting, chewing, or eating or drinking something sweet, hot or cold
- Cracked or broken teeth



Simple Steps to Improve Oral Health

- **Brush at least twice per day, including before bedtime.** Use toothpaste with fluoride and a soft-bristle toothbrush. Use mouthwash if recommended by your dentist.
- **Floss every day.** The spaces between your teeth and under your gums cannot be reached with a toothbrush.
- **Eat healthy.** Limit daytime snacking and snacks high in sugar or starch, such as sodas, cookies or candy. Visit choosemyplate.gov for healthy eating tips.
- **Drink tap water.** The fluoride in New York City's tap water helps keep your teeth strong.
- **Avoid tobacco.** Tobacco use greatly increases your risk of gum disease, as well as mouth and throat cancer. Visit nysmokefree.com or call 866-NY-QUITS (866-697-8487) to apply for a free starter kit and to talk to a quit coach.
- **Limit alcohol.** Drinking a lot of alcohol increases your risk of mouth and throat issues, including cancer. If you need support to limit alcohol, call **311** or NYC Well at 888-NYC-WELL (888-692- 9355).
- **Know your risk.** Your habits, health conditions, age and family history can all increase your risk of dental disease. See your health care provider regularly, and talk to your dentist about possible risks and any special care you may need.
- **Visit your dentist.** Regular dental visits (at least once per year) help find problems early, when they are easier to treat.

Insurance Information

Dental care is covered by Medicaid and the Child Health Plus health insurance plan, regardless of immigration status.

For more information about enrolling in health insurance, visit nyc.gov/health/healthcoverage. To find a low-cost dental provider, call **311** or visit nyc.gov/health/teeth.

For information about oral health,
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