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# Benefits News



## Oral Health Is Whole-Body Health

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Oral health is more important than you might realize. Learn how the health of your mouth, teeth, and gums can affect your general health and wellbeing.

### Connecting Oral Health to Overall Health

Our mouths are full of germs. Although most of those germs are harmless, your mouth is an entry point to your digestive and respiratory systems. This means the germs can potentially cause disease throughout the rest of your body.

Good oral hygiene, including daily brushing and flossing, helps control these germs. It also prevents infections like tooth decay and gum disease.

### Conditions Linked to Oral Health

Poor oral health is linked to a severe form of gum disease called periodontitis. Germs from oral issues can also play a role in diseases that affect other parts of your body. These include:



**Heart disease.** Studies suggest that heart disease may be linked to inflammation and infections caused by germs in the mouth. This includes clogged arteries and strokes.



Pregnancy and birth complications. Gum disease has been linked to **premature birth** and low birth weight.



**Pneumonia.** Oral germs can get into the lungs through the respiratory tract. This can cause pneumonia and other respiratory diseases.

Additionally, there are certain health conditions that can have an effect on oral health. These include:



**Diabetes**. Gum disease seems to be more prevalent and serious in people who have diabetes. Research also shows that those with gum disease have a harder time controlling their blood sugar levels.



**HIV/AIDS**. Oral problems are common in people who have HIV/AIDS. This includes painful mouth sores.



**Cancer**. Gum disease has been linked to a number of different cancers. This includes cancers of the mouth, esophagus, stomach, lungs, breast, prostate gland, and uterus.



**Alzheimer's disease**. The oral health of people with Alzheimer's tends to get worse as their disease progresses.



## Oral Health Protection

Here are some things you can do every day to help protect your and your family's oral health:



- Brush your teeth for two minutes at least twice a day. (Don't forget your tongue!)
- Use a toothbrush with soft bristles.
- Use fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss your teeth daily. (Watch this [short video](#) to make sure you're flossing the right way.)
- Eat a healthy diet. Avoid foods and beverages that contain a lot of sugar. Replace your toothbrush every 3 to 4 months. (Replace it sooner if the bristles are visibly worn out.)
- Have a regular dental checkup and cleaning at least once a year.
- Take your children to the dentist at least once a year. Their first visit should be around their first birthday.
- Don't smoke or use tobacco products.

Sources:

- [Mayo Clinic](#)
- [American Dental Association](#)
- [Cleveland Clinic](#)