

Your mouth is talking. *Are you listening?*

Four out of five Missourians know they should have two dental checkups a year, but only about half actually go that often. What's more, nearly one-fourth have recently gone two or more years without seeing their dentist at all. Missourians say cost and lack of time are reasons, but the cost of treating preventable problems is much higher than regularly scheduled exams and cleanings. Left untreated, dental decay does not heal and will get worse. This can cause more serious health concerns and more expensive treatment.

If it has been more than six months since you've seen your dentist, it's time you two got together.

What is your mouth saying?

The Missouri Dental Association (MDA) recommends that all Missourians, regardless of age, receive regular checkups to keep their teeth and gums healthy and to detect problems early. Visit www.YourMouthIsTalking.org for oral health tips, resources and assistance in finding an MDA dentist.

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Yeah, yeah

you know the drill. Brush. Floss. Checkups. But do you? Only half of Missourians see their dentist twice a year. HELLO! Gum disease may be linked to heart disease, among other problems. So call that dentist. And let's floss tonight. YOUR MOUTH

www.YourMouthIsTalking.org



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What happens in your mouth... doesn't stay in your mouth

The importance of oral health reaches far beyond your mouth. Research has shown links between gum disease and other significant health conditions. For example:

- **PRENATAL CARE** Research is not conclusive, but there have been studies linking poor oral health in pregnant women to premature birth and low birth weight babies.
- **HEART DISEASE** Recent studies indicate there may be a link between gum disease and heart disease. For example, some research suggests that bacteria from the mouth can enter the bloodstream and increase the risk for heart disease.
- **DIABETES MANAGEMENT** Oral infections and gum disease can be more severe and difficult to treat in people with diabetes. For this reason, a regular oral health screening is as important as a foot health screening and is a habit worth making.

Your Mouth by the Decades

As you age, your health needs and risks change. The same is true with your mouth. At each stage of life there are important preventive maintenance guidelines to improve your oral health – which can improve your total health.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

- The American Dental Association and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry both recommend scheduling a child's first dental visit around the first birthday.
- Start cleaning baby's mouth early. Once the child is able to spit, use a pea-size amount of fluoridated toothpaste. Children need help brushing correctly until they can write in cursive.
- Parents with poor oral health can pass decay-causing bacteria from their saliva to their babies by sharing spoons or blowing on hot food.

KIDS AND TEENS

- You don't have to deny your sweet tooth altogether – just be smart about how much. An overload of sugary beverages, juices, sports drinks and energy drinks can lead to tooth decay, as well as other health problems.
- Don't forget to protect your mouth during sport activities. A properly-fitted mouth guard can help prevent broken teeth and injuries to the lips, tongue, face or jaw.
- Braces? Take special care to brush, floss and rinse after each meal.

ADULTS

- Your habits influence theirs! Twice-daily brushing and flossing and two checkups a year show your kids how much you value oral health.
- Teeth whitening can affect your oral health; the MDA recommends consulting with your dentist before using any whitening product.
- Limit the use of tobacco and alcohol to help prevent oral cancer. Smokers also may have deep pockets of bad bacteria between teeth and loss of the bone and tissue support in the mouth.

OLDER ADULTS

- Don't let arthritis get in the way of brushing and flossing. Use a power toothbrush and pre-threaded flossers or flexible plastic picks with bristles.
- If you take medications for osteoporosis tell your dentist. Some of these medications contain bisphosphonates which have been linked to a condition that can damage the jawbone.
- Don't dismiss a dry mouth – mention it to your dentist. It can lead to tooth decay and may be a sign of a more serious problem.