



# Feature Articles

## Conquer your sugar cravings for better oral health



A healthy diet is just as important for your teeth and gums as it is for the rest of your body. Sugar-rich foods and drinks increase your risk of tooth decay (cavities), obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. That's why

dental hygienists, essential primary health care professionals and strong supporters of Canada's Food Guide, stress the importance of cutting back on sugar to protect both oral and overall health.

Not sure where to start? Here are six tips to conquer your sugar cravings:

1. Keep a full pitcher of water in your refrigerator and drink water with every meal.

2. Flavour your water with fresh fruit or herbs.
3. Eat a variety of crunchy vegetables and fruits daily.
4. Buy cereals and drinks that are low in sugar or sugar-free.
5. Use unsweetened applesauce instead of sugar when baking.
6. Choose chewing gum and mints sweetened with xylitol, a natural sugar substitute that also neutralizes acids in your mouth to prevent tooth decay.

Don't forget to combine these sugar-reduction efforts with twice-daily toothbrushing (two minutes each time with fluoride toothpaste), daily cleaning between your teeth, and rinsing with an antibacterial mouthwash.

By reducing the amount of sugar you consume daily and developing good oral hygiene habits, you can keep cavities at bay and enjoy better overall health.

For more information, visit [dentalhygienecanada.ca/sugar](http://dentalhygienecanada.ca/sugar).

## Understand the connections between diabetes and oral health



In Canada, one in three people has diabetes or prediabetes, a chronic disease that prevents the body from producing or properly using insulin. Diabetes affects a person's health in many ways, including

increasing the risk for heart disease and stroke, kidney disease, glaucoma, and cataracts. But did you know that diabetes can also affect oral health?

If diabetes is poorly controlled, it can create a burning sensation in the mouth or on the tongue. Worse, it can cause oral thrush (a fungal infection in the mouth) or dry mouth (xerostomia), a condition in which the glands in the mouth don't produce enough saliva, raising the risk of cavities. Poorly controlled diabetes can also increase a person's risk of developing

periodontal disease, an infection of the gums and bone that surround and support the teeth. Initially, gums may be sore or bleed when brushed. Over time, the infection may cause bone loss that can lead to tooth loss. At the same time, untreated periodontal disease can cause blood sugar to rise, creating a vicious circle in which diabetes becomes even more difficult to control.

But there is good news: dental hygienists can identify signs and symptoms of undiagnosed or uncontrolled diabetes. They will refer you to your doctor for a medical consultation and can help you manage your blood glucose levels by offering nutrition counselling and smoking cessation strategies. They will also work with you to develop an individualized at-home oral care routine, including twice daily toothbrushing with a fluoride toothpaste and daily cleaning between your teeth. Together, your dental hygienist and your doctor—essential primary health care providers—can give you the tools you need to take care of your diabetes and your teeth, preventing serious complications and promoting optimal health.

Learn more about diabetes and oral health at [dentalhygienecanada.ca/diabetes](http://dentalhygienecanada.ca/diabetes)



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## Springtime smiles: April is oral health month



April is oral health month in Canada and a perfect time to set new goals to help your smile shine. The theme of the month once again is “Oral Health for Total Health,” which is an important reminder that taking good care of our mouth, teeth, and gums benefits our overall physical and mental well-being.

If you’re not sure where to start, ask your dental hygienist for guidance during your next appointment. As essential primary health care providers, dental hygienists will work with you to develop a daily oral care plan to promote good oral health and prevent disease. They can also offer individualized treatment recommendations for oral conditions, tobacco cessation and nutrition counselling, and oral cancer screenings.

In the meantime, it’s easy to commit to these six simple steps:

1. Brush your teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.
2. Clean between your teeth daily.
3. Use an antibacterial mouthrinse once a day.
4. Make healthy food and beverage choices.
5. Eliminate tobacco use.
6. See an oral health professional every six months.

Maintaining good oral health would not be possible without the help of Canada’s dedicated oral health professionals. Consider thanking your dental hygienist during National Dental Hygienists Week, which takes place from April 4 to 10 during oral health month. It’s yet another reason to smile.

For more information on oral health, visit [dentalhygienecanada.ca](http://dentalhygienecanada.ca)

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## What to know about the interim Canada Dental Benefit

On December 1, 2022, the federal government launched the Canada Dental Benefit, an interim program to cover the cost of professional oral health care services for children under the age of 12.

### 1. Who is eligible for the benefit?

Children under 12 years of age, whose parents or caregivers have an annual net family income under \$90,000 and who do not have private dental insurance

### 2. How much is the benefit?

Up to \$650 per year, per child, to cover professional oral care services that would have otherwise been paid for out of pocket

### 3. What does the benefit cover?

Dental exams, X-rays, cleanings, fluoride applications, oral hygiene instruction, tooth extractions, fillings or any treatment provided by a dentist or dental hygienist as of October 1, 2022

### 4. How do I apply for the benefit?

Visit the Canada Revenue Agency’s website for all the details. If you have specific questions, you can call them at 1.800.715.8836

Seeing an oral health professional is important for overall health, but it can be expensive. This effort by the federal government to improve access to preventive oral care for children across Canada will have a lasting impact. With this interim benefit, families of an estimated 500,000 children will be able to address some of the oral health needs of their young children without paying out of pocket while the government continues to develop a long-term Canadian dental care program.



For more information, visit [dentalhygienecanada.ca/canadadentalbenefit](http://dentalhygienecanada.ca/canadadentalbenefit)



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## Teach your school-aged kids to love their teeth

As parents and guardians, we are responsible for the overall health and well-being of our children, which includes their oral health. Once our children are old enough to hold

a toothbrush, we should teach them how to brush and clean between their teeth, even if we (the adults) still do most of the work.

By age 7, most children will be capable of taking care of their own teeth, but may need occasional gentle reminders to:

1. Brush all tooth surfaces twice a day for two minutes, using a pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste.
2. Clean between the teeth every day using floss, soft picks or a small interdental brush.
3. Choose water over fruit juice or pop.
4. Eat healthy snacks, such as apples, raw vegetables, cheese, and plain yogourt.

Children ages 9 to 12 may need extra support as they begin to experience physical and emotional changes that can increase their risk for cavities, gingivitis, and bad breath.

Scheduling regular dental hygiene appointments is also important. Your child's dental hygienist will make sure that they are using proper toothbrushing techniques and making healthy dietary choices. They may also recommend treatments such as fluoride varnish or dental sealants (a thin coating painted on the deep grooves of molars) to prevent cavities. In some cases, they may refer your child to an orthodontist for a check-up to see how their face and jaws are growing, how their teeth are closing together, and if anything may affect how their teeth will function in the future. If you don't have private dental insurance to cover the cost of these vital services, you may be eligible for the interim Canada Dental Benefit.

Working together, parents, guardians, and oral health professionals can provide children with the oral care tools they need to become healthy, thriving teenagers. That's something to smile about!

Find more tooth tips for children ages 7 to 12 at [dentalhygienecanada.ca/kids7-12](https://dentalhygienecanada.ca/kids7-12).

## Toothbrushing for total health

Taking good care of your teeth and gums will help prevent tooth loss and keep the rest of your body healthy. Poor oral health has been linked to diabetes, heart disease and respiratory diseases.

Getting toothbrushing right is the first step. To clean the surfaces and hard-to-reach areas of your teeth properly, you must use the right toothbrush:

1. Choose a soft or extra-soft toothbrush.
2. Choose a brush with a smaller head (even a children's toothbrush) if you have a small mouth.
3. Power toothbrushes, if you can afford one, are better at removing dental plaque than a manual toothbrush.

Once you've got your toothbrush in hand, wet it and then place a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste on the bristles. Divide your mouth into 4 sections: top, bottom, left and right. Position the bristles of your toothbrush so that they touch both your gums and

teeth, and brush all surfaces of your teeth: cheek side, tongue side, and biting surfaces. Brush for two minutes, spending 30 seconds in each section of your mouth. Don't forget to brush your tongue, using a sweeping motion from the back to the tip of the tongue to remove harmful bacteria.



Brushing your teeth twice a day reduces your risk of cavities, gum disease and bad breath, and it prevents bacteria in your mouth from spreading to other parts of your body. It's a quick and easy way to protect your oral and overall health.

For more information on oral health, visit [dentalhygienecanada.ca](https://dentalhygienecanada.ca)



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## Seniors can keep on smiling with good oral health



The need for good oral health continues as we age, become chronically ill or move to a long-term care residence. Unfortunately, many older adults, especially those who rely on others for care, have poor oral hygiene and high rates of oral disease.

Oral diseases can cause pain, discomfort, bad breath and difficulties chewing and swallowing. They are also associated with more serious health complications like diabetes, stroke and heart and lung diseases. Fortunately, daily mouth care can remove food debris and bacteria that grow on gums, teeth, and dentures, improving oral and overall health.

Dental hygienists encourage all older adults to brush their teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and clean between their teeth once a day. Denture wearers should remove their dentures at night to clean them and allow their gums to breathe while sleeping. They should also clean any remaining teeth twice daily and brush and massage their gums either with a soft toothbrush or a warm damp cloth. Caregivers must help when these tasks become challenging; your dental hygienist can offer tips for supporting seniors with their oral care.

Whether you're at home or in a long-term care residence, daily mouth and denture care coupled with professional oral care and guidance from a dental hygienist can help prevent oral diseases, reduce the risk of health complications, and keep you smiling in your golden years.

Find more information at [dentalhygienecanada.ca/seniors](https://dentalhygienecanada.ca/seniors).

## Oral cancer: early detection and prevention are key



Oral and oropharyngeal cancers, now among the 10 most common cancers worldwide, often go unnoticed at first because they can develop without pain or symptoms. But, if the cancer is detected early and before it has spread to other tissues, it can usually be treated successfully.

Dental hygienists, essential primary health care professionals, provide oral cancer screenings during appointments and will make referrals to specialists if they spot anything unusual. Between oral care appointments, however, we should watch for any of the following changes in our mouths:

- Alterations to the colour or texture of gums, cheeks, lips or tongue
- Mouth lumps or sores that do not heal within 14 days
- Chronic sore throat or cough
- Difficulty swallowing
- Lumps in the neck, including those that aren't bothersome
- Mouth or ear pain

That's not all. Just as we can help with early detection, we also have a role to play in preventing oral cancers from developing in the first place. Tobacco use, alcohol consumption, sun exposure to the lips and the human papillomavirus (HPV) are all known risk factors for oral cancers. While modifying our smoking and drinking habits is a necessary first step, preventing HPV infection is proving to be even more important.

In Canada, 25% to 35% of oral and oropharyngeal cancers are now related to HPV infection, and this rate continues to rise. Fortunately, there are three HPV vaccines that have been proven to be highly effective at preventing HPV-related diseases. Health Canada recommends that everyone under the age of 27 consider getting vaccinated against HPV. In some cases, it may be appropriate for men and women over the age of 27 to receive the vaccine as well.

Your dental hygienist can offer tobacco cessation strategies and other guidance on lifestyle choices to help reduce your risk of oral cancer. By committing to a healthy lifestyle, booking an appointment for an HPV vaccine, examining our mouths for suspicious changes and scheduling regular dental hygiene visits, we can protect our oral and overall health.

For more information on oral cancer and self-examination tips, visit [dentalhygienecanada.ca](https://dentalhygienecanada.ca).



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## Vaping: A Reality Check



Vaping in Canada is on the rise, but it's an activity that is not without risks. There is growing evidence of its harmful effects on both oral and overall health.

Vaping is the act of inhaling and exhaling an aerosol produced by devices, such as e-cigarettes, vape pens,

electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), and e-hookahs. It can expose you to nicotine or THC, which may be addictive and can have many adverse side effects, including lung damage, dry mouth, cavities, periodontal disease, and oral cancer.

### Did you know?

1. A single vape pod may contain as much nicotine as a pack of 20 cigarettes.
2. Nicotine-containing vaping products alter youth brain development and can affect memory, concentration, judgement, and mood.

3. Vaping may increase your risk of mouth sores, cavities, and gum disease.
4. Other vaping dangers include explosions, burn injuries, unintentional poisoning, second-hand vapour, and associated lung injury.
5. Coughing, shortness of breath, and/or chest pain may be signs of vaping-related illness.
6. Vaping is not recommended as a safe alternative to smoking.

Dental hygienists understand the oral and overall health risks associated with vaping and can give you the information you need to make a choice that's right for you. Don't let the popularity and pervasiveness of vaping devices cloud your judgement: vaping is not harmless.

Find more information at [dentalhygienecanada.ca/vaping](https://dentalhygienecanada.ca/vaping)