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Healthy Eating for a Healthy Smile



Food and beverage choices have an impact on a person's oral and overall health. We know that a sugar-rich diet increases the risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease, but did you know that foods high in sugar or acid can

also lead to a weakening of tooth enamel and contribute to tooth decay?

Keeping your teeth and mouth healthy requires more than just daily brushing, flossing, and rinsing. Dental hygienists remind us to maintain a balanced and nutritious diet so that teeth and gums receive the nutrients that are essential to resisting oral diseases. As your "partners in prevention," dental hygienists offer simple tips to keep your mouth and body healthy:

- Read the labels! When shopping, avoid ingredients ending in "-ose" as they are typically high in sugar.
- Cut back on added sugar by eliminating sugary cereals, granola bars, sodas, energy drinks, and fruit punches from your diet.

- Choose nutritious snacks like apples, cheese, and plain yogurt, adhering to Canada's Food Guide recommendations.
- Set a daily limit on treats for children.
- Make water your family's beverage of choice.
- Plan and pack snacks in advance to prevent temptation.
- Consider products flavoured with the natural sugar substitute xylitol.

Remember: the average diet can include some sugar, but moderation is key. By reducing your daily sugar intake and maintaining good oral hygiene habits (brushing twice a day for two minutes each time, cleaning between the teeth and rinsing daily), you can reduce your risk of tooth decay and other diseases.

For personalized advice on healthy food and beverage choices, talk to your dental hygienist during your next appointment. Together, you can work towards maintaining healthy smiles for a lifetime. To learn more, visit dentalhygienecanada.ca/sugar.

April Highlights Importance of Oral Health for Total Health



National Dental Hygienists Week takes place from April 4 to 10 as part of oral health month in Canada. It's a perfect time to set new oral care goals for yourself, with support from your dental hygienist, an essential primary health care provider who sees

first-hand how good oral hygiene benefits both physical and mental well-being.

Dental hygienists work in a variety of settings, including independent dental hygiene practice, with people of all ages. They will help you develop good daily oral care routines and will offer treatment recommendations and disease prevention strategies to keep you smiling. Whether calming toddlers at their first dental hygiene appointment or providing care

to older adults in long-term care homes, dental hygienists want everyone to enjoy "Oral Health for Total Health."

This April, join your dental hygienist on the path to good oral health by taking just six small steps:

1. Brush your teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.
2. Clean between your teeth daily with floss or other interdental devices
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.

For more information on oral health, visit dentalhygienecanada.ca.



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Older Adults and Their Oral Health

Today's seniors can expect to keep most, if not all, of their natural teeth as they age thanks to healthier lifestyles and advances in oral and medical care. But keeping those teeth healthy can be a challenge.

Restricted mobility, cognitive impairments, and medications that cause dry mouth can all contribute to oral problems and complicate treatment. Even more worrisome is the fact that bacteria from the mouth can travel through the body, resulting in serious infections and inflammation that can lead to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and stroke.

Dental hygienists encourage all older adults to brush their teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and clean in between their teeth at least once a day. They also advise anyone with dentures (full or partial) and their caregivers to clean dentures daily, and brush and massage the gums either with a soft toothbrush or a warm damp cloth. Remember to remove dentures overnight to maintain healthy mouth tissue.

In addition to good daily mouth and denture care, all older adults need to schedule regular appointments for professional oral care. Thanks to the new Canadian Dental Care Plan and to dental hygienists who operate mobile dental hygiene practices, it's getting easier to do so. Whether you are



in your own home or in a long-term care residence, you can receive professional oral health care where you live from dental hygienists who are committed to keeping you smiling as you age.

For more information, visit dentalhygienecanada.ca/seniors.

Diabetes and Your Oral Health: A Vital Connection



Did you know that your oral health can affect your diabetes, and vice versa? In Canada, one in three people has diabetes or prediabetes, making it crucial to understand this mouth-body connection.

Diabetes is a disease that prevents the body from effectively using or producing insulin, a hormone that regulates blood sugar. When we talk about diabetes and oral health, we are concerned about all four types: prediabetes, Type 1 (usually found in childhood), Type 2 (common in adults), and gestational (during pregnancy). The signs and symptoms of diabetes include increased thirst, frequent urination, hunger, unexplained weight loss, fatigue, slow healing sores, and frequent infections.

For those with diabetes, regular appointments with your dental hygienist are vital. Poorly controlled diabetes raises your risk of

gum disease, dry mouth, oral thrush, and a burning sensation in the mouth or on the tongue. Gum disease can also make your diabetes harder to manage. At home, be sure to monitor and control your blood glucose, brush twice daily, follow a healthy diet, quit smoking, and use sugar-free gum or mints.

Tips for your dental hygiene appointments:

- Inform your dental hygienist about your diabetes.
- Schedule appointments when glucose levels are highest.
- Know your glycated hemoglobin level (HbA1c).
- Bring a list of medications and inform about the timing of insulin or meals.
- Report any changes in denture fit, gum pain or sores.

Dental hygienists can identify signs of diabetes and will work with you to help you achieve and maintain optimal oral health. By managing both diabetes and oral care, you can enhance your overall health and well-being.

For more information, visit dentalhygienecanada.ca/diabetes.



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The Heart-Mouth Connection: What You Should Know

Your oral health routine isn't just about pearly whites—it's a crucial aspect of your heart health too. Neglecting your oral hygiene allows harmful bacteria to flourish, leading to issues such as bad breath, cavities, and

gingivitis (gum disease), which left untreated can progress to periodontitis. These bacteria can also travel through your bloodstream, increasing the chances of infections such as endocarditis and contributing to clogged arteries that may lead to heart attacks or strokes.

Recognizing signs of poor oral health is key. Keep an eye out for red, swollen gums, bleeding during brushing or flossing, receding gums, bad breath, and signs of infection or decay. Individuals with advanced gingivitis or periodontitis, diagnosed heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, or those who smoke are particularly at risk.

Taking proactive steps is vital. Say no to cigarettes, adopt a vitamin-rich diet, and prioritize regular exercise. To prevent gum issues, maintain a daily oral care routine, brushing for two minutes twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, cleaning between your teeth with floss or interdental tools, and rinsing with an antibacterial solution.

Even if the direct link between gum and heart disease isn't fully understood, studies show a higher risk for heart problems in those with poor oral health. A consistent oral care routine and regular appointments with your dental hygienist are crucial. Remember to tell your dental hygienist about your health conditions and any medications you are taking.

Your dental hygienist is an ally in both oral and heart health. So, smile confidently—your heart will thank you!

To learn more about the connection between your heart and oral health, visit dentalhygienecanada.ca.

Gingivitis: A Red Flag You Can't Ignore

Gingivitis, a common form of gum disease, silently affects 7 in 10 Canadians during their lifetime. Caused by harmful bacteria in dental plaque, this mild infection lurks below the gumline, leading to red, swollen gums, tenderness, bleeding, and bad breath. Often painless, gingivitis can go unnoticed until a dental hygienist steps in to address the issue.

Detecting gingivitis early is crucial, as untreated cases may progress to periodontitis, a more severe gum disease that can result in tooth loss and complications such as elevated blood sugar levels in diabetes. This is particularly critical for seniors, as complications from dental issues can exacerbate other existing health conditions associated with aging.

Various factors contribute to gingivitis. Hormonal shifts during puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause can heighten vulnerability to bacterial infections in the mouth. Chronic diseases and stress weaken the immune system, while poor nutrition and specific medications further compromise the body's ability to fend off infections. Smoking, vaping, and tobacco use increase the risk of gingivitis by causing dryness in the mouth, accelerating plaque buildup, and hindering gum healing.

Preventing and treating gingivitis involves adopting good oral hygiene practices. Brushing for two minutes, twice a day, with a soft-bristled toothbrush along the gumline, cleaning between teeth with floss or interdental tools, and using an antibacterial mouth rinse are essential. A healthy diet rich in proteins, fruits, and vegetables supports overall oral health. Quitting smoking and tobacco use is critical, as is scheduling regular appointments with a dental hygienist.



Your dental hygienist will help you maintain firm, pink gums that form a tight collar around each tooth. Embracing these habits collaboratively with an oral health professional can safeguard gums and contribute to a lifetime of healthy smiles.

Find more information at dentalhygienecanada.ca.



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Dry Mouth: When Drinking More Water Isn't Enough



A sticky, dry mouth is more than an uncomfortable feeling. Occasional dry mouth from nervousness or dehydration goes away with a glass of water. But if your mouth is often dry, your tongue is sticking to the roof of your mouth, and it is difficult to chew, swallow and talk, you may have persistent dry mouth, known as xerostomia.

Dry mouth affects your overall health and well-being. Difficulty chewing and swallowing makes it a challenge to eat well. Difficulty talking can be socially embarrassing. Dry mouth can also cause bad breath, sores in your mouth and on your lips, cavities, and other oral health problems.

Many things can cause dry mouth. Some medications, especially cold medicines and medications for high blood pressure, depression, and anxiety, will leave your mouth feeling dry. Treatments for cancer and some diseases and chronic conditions are associated with dry mouth. Lifestyle choices, such as smoking, can also cause dry mouth.

If you notice that your mouth often feels dry and swallowing is difficult, ask your oral health care professional for advice. Schedule routine visits with your dental hygienist to monitor your health condition and provide regular cleaning (scaling) and polishing.

For daily comfort, try the following tips:

- Clean your teeth and your mouth twice daily.
- Use an alcohol-free mouth rinse.
- Sip water regularly and drink water with every meal.
- Chew sugar-free gum or suck on sugar-free candies.
- Use lip lubricants or balm to prevent dry lips and sores.
- Avoid foods and drinks that are known to dry your mouth, such as caffeine, alcohol, cinnamon-flavoured items, and spicy and acidic foods.
- Reduce or quit smoking.

Find more information about dry mouth at dentalhygienecanada.ca/seniors.

The Canadian Dental Care Plan: Seniors Come First

Oral health care is essential for overall health and well-being. But many Canadian residents cannot afford to visit an oral health care professional. A new federal insurance plan will help change that. Beginning in 2024, qualifying Canadian residents without private dental insurance can apply to the Canadian Dental Care Plan for help with the costs of visiting an oral health care professional.

Coverage under the plan is rolling out in phases. The first group to qualify is seniors. If you are aged 70 and over and have an adjusted family income of less than \$90,000 per year, you will receive a letter by March 2024 telling you how to apply for coverage under the plan.

Starting May 2024, seniors over the age of 65 can apply for coverage. Children under the age of 18 and persons with a disability tax credit certificate can apply as of June. Other Canadian residents between the ages of 18 and 64 will be able to apply for dental coverage in 2025.

The dental care plan will cover a wide range of oral health care services, including preventive services provided by participating

dental hygienists across the country. These include scaling (cleaning), polishing, sealants, and fluoride. Other services covered under the plan include x-rays, fillings, root canal treatments, dentures, periodontal treatment, and extractions.



Seniors are especially at risk for the complications caused by poor oral health. Gum disease increases the risk for heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. A sore mouth or loss of teeth can make it difficult to eat, leading to malnutrition. Dry mouth is another concern that often affects seniors and can cause cavities.

With the new Canadian Dental Care Plan and professional oral health care services provided by dental hygienists in mobile practices and store-front dental clinics, seniors and all eligible residents in Canada will be able to achieve better overall health for life. Find more information about the Canadian Dental Care Plan and oral health for seniors at dentalhygienecanada.ca.