

Good oral health is more than a beautiful smile

Problems with your oral health also can contribute to diseases and conditions such as endocarditis, cardiovascular disease and pneumonia.

Written By: Mayo Clinic News Network | Feb 17th 2021 - 11pm.



To protect your oral health, practice good oral hygiene daily. (Getty Images)

Your oral health is more important than you might realize. Like other areas of the body, your mouth teems with bacteria — and

those bacteria are mostly harmless. But your mouth is the entry point to your digestive and respiratory tracts, and some of these bacteria can cause disease.

Normally the body's natural defenses and good oral health care keep bacteria under control. However, without proper oral hygiene, bacteria can reach levels that might lead to oral infections, such as tooth decay and gum disease.

Problems with your oral health also can contribute to diseases and conditions such as endocarditis, cardiovascular disease and pneumonia.

To protect your oral health, practice good oral hygiene daily:

- Brush your teeth at least twice a day with a soft-bristled brush using fluoride toothpaste. An electric toothbrush can be a great alternative to a manual toothbrush, especially for children, people with disabilities, older adults, and people who have arthritis or other conditions that make it difficult to brush well.
- Floss daily.
- Use mouthwash to remove food particles left after brushing and flossing.
- Eat a healthy diet and limit food with added sugars.
- Replace your toothbrush every three months, or sooner if bristles are splayed or worn.
- Schedule regular dental checkups and cleanings.
- Avoid tobacco use.

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