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How to keep on top of your oral health during the pandemic

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"Oral fitness is as important as exercising to stimulate your heart muscle and strengthen your bones," says Toronto-based dentist and Chief Dental Officer of dentalcorp Dr. Gary Glassman. "It plays just as important a part in keeping up your defences." PHOTO BY SUPPLIED

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all facets of health, and oral care is no exception.

People have been paying less attention to the day-to-day basics of maintaining their teeth and gums. But now is not the time to abandon your oral health, says Dr. Gary Glassman, a Toronto-based dentist and Chief Dental Officer of dentalcorp, Canada's largest and leading network of dental clinics.

"While some might think these practices aren't that important, dentists and hygienists spend a lot of time educating people on the link between your mouth and body" he says. "Most people simply don't understand there is an important connection between the two. It's especially important in the midst of a global pandemic that is putting people's health at risk."

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“When brushing, don't forget to brush on and around the gum line”

"Oral fitness is as important as exercising to stimulate your heart muscle and strengthen your bones. It plays just as important a part in keeping up your defences against bacteria. That's especially critical in the current climate, as patients are cancelling appointments, increasing the risk of more serious problems."

The consequences of bypassing the basics may start small. But they can soon turn into more serious issues such as cavities and gum disease, which is where problems can really escalate, Dr. Glassman says. "Gum disease can wreak havoc on your system. Over time it can have an impact on existing health conditions, or in some cases, trigger underlying conditions that may not have surfaced before. It may contribute to cardiovascular disease, diabetes or stroke."

Daily brushing and flossing play a big part in keeping bacteria under control, Dr. Glassman says.

“The basics are so easy, but it’s amazing how many people don’t do regular flossing and brushing when they are isolating at home.”

When brushing, don’t forget to brush on and around the gum line, he says. Dr. Glassman also recommends regularly massaging gums with a rubber tip and using a tongue scraper to help remove any lingering bacteria on the tongue.

KEEP YOUR TEETH AND GUMS HEALTHY

BRUSH YOUR TEETH AT LEAST TWICE A DAY
Use a soft-bristled toothbrush, which gives your teeth a good cleaning without damaging the protective layer of enamel. Use a fluoride toothpaste (except on young children as fluoride can cause discoloration in new teeth that are forming).

DON'T FORGET YOUR GUMS
Daily flossing helps prevent plaque build-up. Use a rubber-tipped gum massager to stimulate circulation.

RINSE AND REPEAT
Use a non-alcoholic or antibacterial mouth rinse OR, rinse with warm salt water as part of your oral hygiene routine.

WATCH YOUR DIET
Avoid hard candies that might crack your teeth. Avoid sugary foods.

HELP YOUR SALIVA DO ITS BACTERIA-FIGHTING WORK
Avoid dry mouth by drinking lots of water.

ACCORDING TO THE CANADIAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION
7 OUT OF 10 CANADIANS WILL DEVELOP GUM DISEASE

What is gingivitis? A plaque-induced disease that causes inflammation of the gums. In mild cases, it can cause swelling, irritation and redness. In some cases, it can lead to periodontitis.

What is periodontitis? A serious gum infection that damages the soft tissue and can destroy the bone that supports teeth. When advanced, teeth may loosen or fall out. The leading cause of this condition is poor oral hygiene.

Who can I contact if I don't have a family dentist?
Check out heliodent.com. Simply enter your postal code and the service you need, and it will find the right professional in your neighbourhood.

Which toothbrush is best? It's better to use an electric toothbrush when you can. Electric brushes have a built-in two-minute timer to make sure you brush your teeth thoroughly.

Always keep a regular toothbrush with you when you're not at home. Soft bristles are best. Be sure to change your toothbrush every three months or after you have had an illness.

“A non-alcoholic mouthwash can also help prevent plaque build-up. Rinsing with warm salt water is a great adjunct and helps stimulate circulation in the gums,” Dr. Glassman says.

Another fallout from COVID-19 is that people are less mindful of their food intake, which can also have an impact on oral health. While junk food may be providing some solace during the pandemic, Dr. Glassman says a growing number of patients are coming in with cracked teeth from eating hard candy.

The increased anxiety and stress many are experiencing throughout these times are also increasing clenching and grinding. “Be sure to wear a nightguard if you have one,” Dr. Glassman recommends.

Most dental clinics across the country are now open for routine care appointments. While people may have concerns about visiting a dentist’s office, it is important to visit a hygienist at least twice a year for a proper scaling and cleaning. Professional cleaning is the only way to remove tartar.

which traps plaque bacteria along the gum line. Patients who are staying home and are unsure about booking an in-person appointment can easily access virtual teledentistry services for emergencies. While helpful in certain situations, teledentistry is not a substitute for professional cleaning.



PHOTO BY SUPPLIED

“There are several different platforms available that allow you to fill out medical questionnaires, upload images of your teeth and oral cavity, and speak to dentists,” Dr. Glassman says. “They allow dentists to at least have a cursory look and get a better understanding of whether you need to see someone in person or if you can hold off visiting for the time.”

While some visits to the dentist can be postponed, there are certain signs that you should not put off a visit any longer. These include pain, swelling in the face or gums, bleeding gums, persistent bad breath, chipped or broken teeth, ongoing sensitivity to hot and cold, loose teeth or discoloration of a tooth (a sign the tooth may be dying or infection is developing).

Dr. Glassman notes that dental offices are well equipped with personal protective equipment, as well as social distancing and rigorous infection prevention and control practices. “People can rest assured that dental clinics meet all the recommended safety guidelines to prevent COVID-19 transmission.”

If you don’t have a regular dentist, that’s no excuse, he adds. “People who don’t have access to a regular dentist can visit hellodent.com to quickly and easily find one in their area.”

This story was created by Content Works, Postmedia’s commercial content division, on behalf of dentalcorp.



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