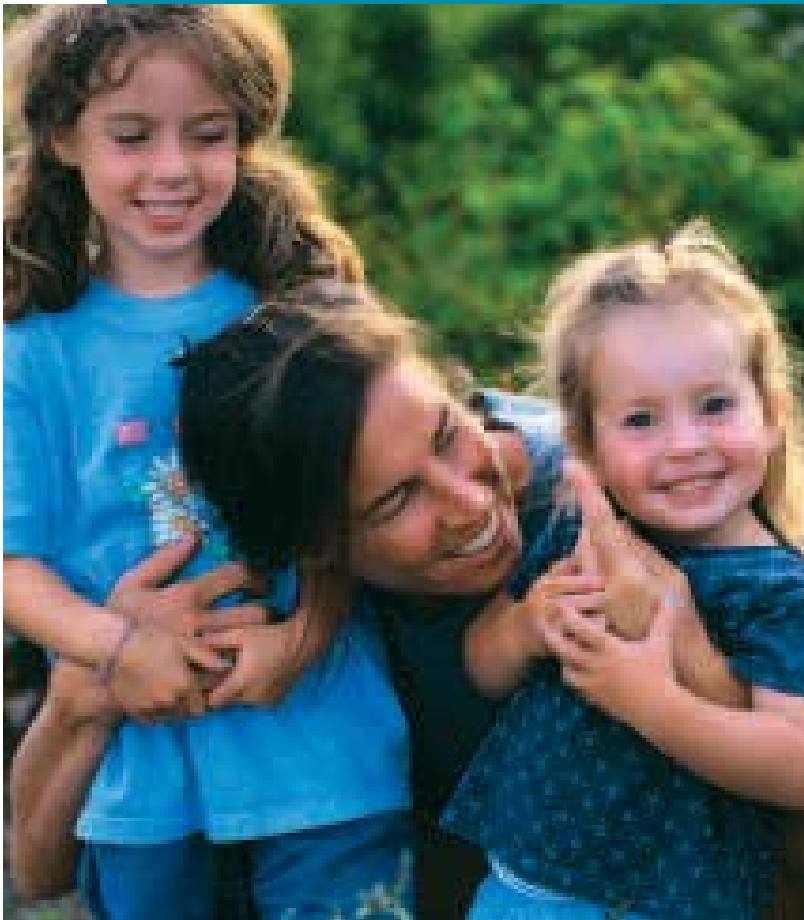


A SMILE A DAY SERIES



From Your Teeth to Your Toes

A GUIDE TO
ORAL HEALTH
FOR OVERALL
WELL-BEING



*VhiDeCare
Dental*



Total Well-being Requires Good Oral Health

Did you know that dental care is an important part of your overall healthcare? Just like exercising, eating well, and seeing your doctor to help you stay healthy, taking care of your teeth is an essential part of your general healthcare.

Your Mouth as a Mirror

Your mouth is a mirror of your overall health. Do you talk with your dentist about your general health as you do with your doctor? Perhaps you should. Your dentist may be the first to notice signs of a serious health problem. A dentist examining your mouth or face may identify signs of:

- Cancers of the throat, tongue or mouth
- Diabetes
- Eating disorders
- Autoimmune and immune deficiency disorders
- Osteoporosis
- Harmful effects of tobacco use
- Some vitamin deficiencies.

You can find out more about the conditions listed above at www.vhi.ie/dental and at the Dental Health Foundation website at www.dentalhealth.ie



A SMILE A DAY

The Plaque Progression

Nasty little problems like cavities and gum disease begin with plaque, a bacterial film that we all have in our mouths. Plaque is constantly forming on the teeth and between the teeth and gums. It clings to teeth as a sticky film and can lead to tooth decay and other problems if left unchecked.

How plaque can lead to decay and gum disease:

After you eat sugary foods or foods containing starch, the bacteria in plaque produces acids.

If the plaque is not removed by proper brushing and flossing, the acids produced start to attack tooth enamel.

Repeated attacks cause the enamel to start to break down, causing tooth decay and cavities.

Plaque that accumulates around the gum line can cause your gums to become red, swollen, or bleed easily. This is an early form of gum disease called gingivitis.

If left unchecked, plaque can eventually lead to periodontal disease, an infection of the tissues surrounding the teeth.

Periodontal disease is a major cause of tooth loss in adults.



Get Rid of Plaque

You must remove plaque on a regular basis to prevent tooth decay and gum disease. Saliva is a natural defence that can help control the bacteria in your mouth, but saliva alone cannot get rid of plaque. You need to brush and floss every day to properly remove plaque. Eating a healthy diet and limiting sugary snacks will also help prevent tooth decay.

How to Clean Your Mouth – Teeth, Tongue, and Gums

Proper brushing and flossing will help keep plaque at bay and take care of your teeth. Here's how to do it:

Brushing Techniques

- ❖ Brush at least twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- ❖ Place a soft bristle brush at a 45-degree angle to the tooth and use a gentle scrubbing technique.
- ❖ Brush the outer and inner and biting surfaces of each tooth, including the part close to the gum line.
- ❖ Use the front tip of the brush for the inner surfaces of the front teeth.
- ❖ Apply light pressure while brushing. Tooth enamel can be worn down by vigorous scrubbing.
- ❖ Don't forget to brush your tongue too. Bacteria left on the tongue can contribute to bad breath.
- ❖ Take your time. It takes at least two minutes of brushing to clean your whole mouth properly.



Be Good to Your Gums – Flossing is a Must

Brushing alone will not be sufficient. Flossing cleans areas between the teeth that your toothbrush can't reach and is essential to prevent tooth decay and gum disease. Be sure to floss at least once a day.

- Use about 18 inches of floss, winding most of it around your middle finger and the rest around the middle finger of your other hand. This finger takes up the used floss.
- Using the thumb and forefingers, gently guide about an inch of floss between the teeth.
- Hold the floss tightly against the tooth and use a gentle up and down motion. Gums can be bruised if floss is 'snapped' into place.
- At the gum line, curve the floss into a C-shape against the sides of both teeth and move it up and down.
- Repeat for all teeth.



The Mouth/Body Connection

Your Mouth is a Window to Your Overall Health

Research suggests that poor oral health can lead to serious health problems. Taking care of your teeth and gums can be an important factor in keeping the rest of your body healthy.



Did You Know?

- Bacteria in plaque can cause an infection in the gums (periodontal disease) that can damage the bone and supporting tissues around your teeth.
- Receding gums and bone loss around teeth can be a sign of osteoporosis.
- People with uncontrolled diabetes may develop serious gum disease.
- Tooth loss and severe gum disease have been linked to heart disease and stroke.
- If you are expecting a baby and have severe gum disease, you have an increased risk of having a premature, low birth weight baby.
- Oral bacteria that cause gum disease are linked with respiratory infections, including bacterial pneumonia.
- Alcohol and smoking combined together increase the risk of cancer of the mouth.

A Healthy Body Needs a Healthy Smile

Oral health means more than an attractive smile, although that is one of the many benefits. Practising good dental habits, such as proper brushing and flossing, eating a healthy diet, and seeing your dentist at least once a year, are all ways you can prevent serious health problems.



A Healthy Defence Checklist

What can you do to keep your mouth healthy?
Just follow these simple tips.

Remember to:

- ☐ Choose healthy foods such as fruit, vegetables and dairy products, and limit sugary foods and drinks, and foods with a lot of starch.
- ☐ Brush your teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Gently scrub all the surfaces of your teeth and your tongue.
- ☐ Replace your toothbrush every two to three months.
- ☐ Floss goes where your toothbrush can't. Be sure to clean between your teeth with dental floss every day.
- ☐ Visit your dentist at least once a year. Your dentist can advise how often you should visit based on your oral health needs.
- ☐ Be sure to tell your dentist about any changes you notice in your mouth.
- ☐ Avoid smoking – people who smoke are six times more likely to develop oral cancer. Smoking can also increase your risk of gum disease.



A S M I L E A D A Y



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This document was reviewed by the National Adult Literacy Agency and produced in consultation with professionals in the Irish Health Services.

For more information log on to www.vhi.ie/dental