

# Your Dental Health

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## in Atlantic Canada



**The link  
between good  
oral health and  
your overall  
health**

**Getting the  
calcium your  
body needs**

**Introducing children  
to the dentist**

## Did you know?

The link between good oral health and your overall health is strong



**Oral hygiene** is not just about having a nice smile—not even close.

Research is increasingly showing a considerable linkage between what's happening in your mouth and your general health. A growing body of statistics indicates that poor oral health increases your chances of suffering from a number of serious diseases

Dr. Rob MacGregor of Kentville NS, past president of the Canadian Dental Association, says in addition to the connection between oral and heart health, “recent research shows that people with oral bacteria and periodontal (gum) disease seem more prone to respiratory illness and having babies with low birth weights. And it has long been known that uncontrolled diabetes can lead to aggressive periodontal disease and vice versa.”

Dental decay is the most chronic prevalent disease in the world.

Approximately five times as many children suffer from dental decay than asthma, and about seven times more than hay fever.

But dental decay and periodontal disease are largely preventable while oral cancer risk can be reduced.

### **The culprit? Bacteria**

Your mouth is brimming with bacteria. The body's natural defenses and daily brushing and flossing, will generally keep them under control—however, without proper oral hygiene, bacteria can reach levels that might lead to oral infections, such as tooth decay and gum disease.

Tooth loss before age 35 might be a risk factor for **Alzheimer's disease**.

The very early (curative) stages of **oral cancer** are most likely to be detected by your dentist.

**Diabetes** reduces the body's resistance to infection, putting the gums at risk. Gum disease appears to be more frequent and severe among people who have diabetes. Conversely, research shows that people with gum disease have a harder time controlling blood sugar levels.

**Endocarditis** is an infection of the inner lining of your heart (endocardium). It typically occurs when bacteria or other germs from another part of your body, such as your mouth, spread through your bloodstream and attach to damaged areas in your heart.

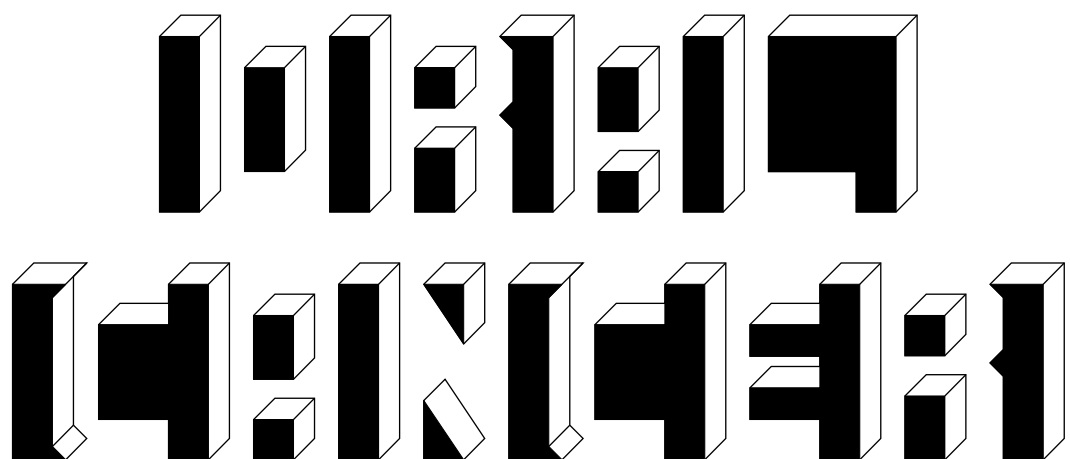
**Pneumonias**, particularly in older or debilitated people, can be caused by inhaling plaque.

**Periodontitis** (gum diseases) has been linked to premature birth and low birth weight.

Some research suggests that **heart disease** (clogged arteries and stroke) might be linked to the inflammation and infections that oral bacteria can cause.

**Osteoporosis**, which causes bones to become weak and brittle, might be linked with periodontal bone loss and tooth loss.

Oral problems, such as painful mucosal lesions, are common in people who have HIV/AIDS. 🍎



NOT EVERYBODY CAN SEE IT, BUT YOUR DENTIST CAN.  
BOOK AN EXAM TODAY.





# Take the smart-mouth quiz



## 1. How often should you brush your teeth?

- a) once a week, or when you start to see a greenish tinge
- b) after every meal or at least once a day
- c) twice a day
- d) whenever things feel fuzzy

### Answer:

b) After every meal is best and always before bed.

## 2. How soon after eating should you brush?

- a) right away. If possible, eat your meals in the bathroom so you're already near the sink.
- b) within a few minutes
- c) about an hour later
- d) it doesn't make any difference

### Answer:

c) About an hour later. Surprisingly, it's best not to brush right away! Your mouth is at its most acidic at mealtimes (because of sugars and other substances mixing with bacteria). If you brush right then, you'll spread that acid around and may damage your tooth enamel. An hour later, things will be calmer in your mouth. Phew — time to brush safely.

## 3. Ideally how long should you brush?

- a) 20 seconds
- b) two to three minutes
- c) one minute to brush your teeth and one minute to brush your tongue
- d) long enough to sing O Canada quickly in your head

### Answer:

b) If you're rushed and don't have two to three minutes to brush, a minute will do the trick once you have flossed, says Dr. John Steeves, a dentist in Fredericton. "If you can get a sustained 60 seconds of brushing, that should give you adequate time to reach all accessible surfaces. As well, it gives you 60 seconds exposure to the fluoride in the toothpaste."

Dr. Steeves recommends using a timer. "It is a great motivator for kids and adults," he notes.

## 4. Flossing is only for grown-ups. True or False?

### Answer:

False. As in, no such luck. Once your teeth are close enough together (as early as age three) you need to floss once a day. Without flossing, more than a third of your tooth surface doesn't get cleaned.

## 5. How should healthy gums look?

- a) shiny and swollen
- b) pale and waxy
- c) bright red from bleeding
- d) none of the above

### Answer:

d) none of the above Healthy gums don't bleed when you brush or floss, they look dull instead of shiny, and are pink (perhaps a dark pink, nearly red, if your skin is dark). Healthy gums are important. They hold your teeth in!

## 6. What is calculus?

- a) a high school math class many kids fear
- b) what your body needs for healthy bones
- c) another word for what happens when plaque (a sticky substance) hardens into tartar on your teeth or under your gumline
- d) something guitar players get on their fingertips

### Answer:

c). Another term for what happens when plaque hardens into tartar.

Tartar harbours more bacteria than plaque, and is worse for your teeth and gums. Brushing, flossing, eating well, and visiting your dentist — all these things can help.

## 7. Why is toffee an especially bad snack?

- a) because it's sticky
- b) it has more sugar than other candy
- c) it can leave dark stains on your teeth
- d) all of the above

### Answer:

a) Because it's sticky. As in, it sticks around in your teeth and causes trouble. No sweets, even fruit gummies, are good choices for snacks. Instead, go for nuts and seeds, peanut butter, cheese, plain yogurt, or popcorn.

## 8. A dessert with your evening meal is better than the same dessert as an after-school snack. True or False?

### Answer:

True, because of how sugar does its damage. The explanation is sort of graphic, but we'll spit it out (pun intended!). The sugars you eat mix with bacteria in your mouth to make an acid that can cause cavities. During meals your mouth makes more saliva, and this helps in two ways: it rinses food particles away and dilutes the cavity-causing acid.

## 9. How often do you need a new toothbrush?

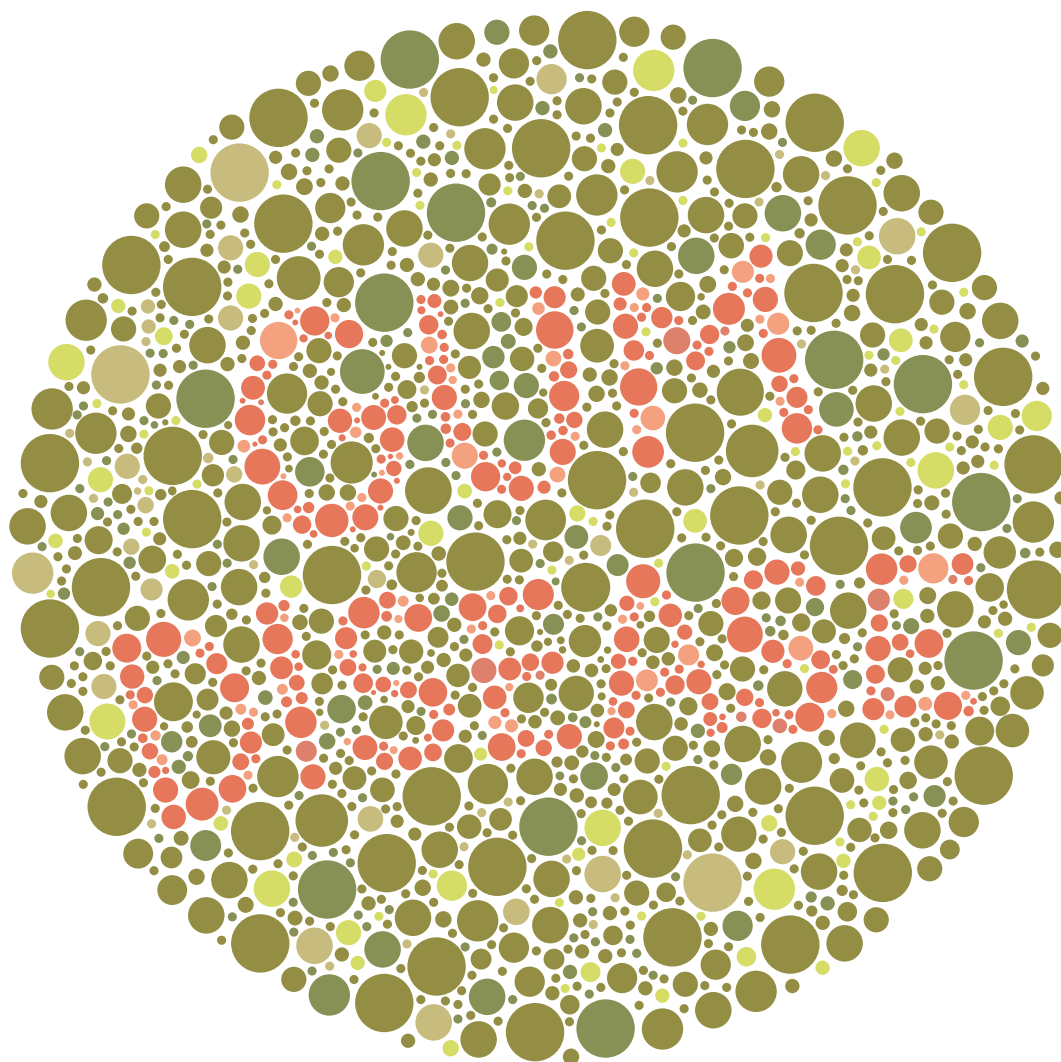
- a) every month
- b) anytime your dog has been chewing on it
- c) every two to three months
- d) at least once before you graduate from high school

### Answer:

c) Every two to three months or when the bristles are starting to fray. Old toothbrushes don't do their job well and can harbour bacteria that can lead to cavities. Also, don't share your toothbrush with anyone (of any species). Don't even let its bristles touch another toothbrush's bristles!

And what type of toothbrush should you use? Soft is best, says Dr. Steeves. "It's the motion of the bristles and using the proper technique combined with the cleaning action of the toothpaste that cleans the tooth surface."

Dr. Steeves is also a big fan of electric brushes. "These brushes don't always come in soft, so I stress the need to be gentle when using them with patients," he notes. 🍎



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# A trilogy for healthy teeth

Getting the calcium your body needs is a three-pronged affair

by Donalee Moulton



## **Feast on this**

A healthy diet should include nutritious sources of calcium, Vitamin D, and phosphorus. Dig in to these foods to get your fill of these important nutrients.

### **Calcium**

Yogurt, milk, cheese, eggnog  
Dark leafy vegetables  
Fish including salmon  
Grains

### **Vitamin D**

Trout, mackerel, salmon, tuna, egg yolk, milk

### **Phosphorus**

Eggs, beef, chicken, turkey, halibut, bread, nuts  
Whole grains, dried fruit, garlic

**Healthy** teeth and gums require a healthy mix of calcium, Vitamin D, and phosphorus. Together these nutrients help young teeth grow strong and help prevent adult teeth and gums from deteriorating as we get older. Here's how:

Calcium, which is a mineral, is the main component in our teeth—accounting for up to 70 per cent of each tooth. Calcium forms part of the dentin, the hard, bony tissue beneath the enamel, as well as part of the hard outer layer of enamel itself. In fact, teeth are the densest structures in our body.



Dr. Mary McNally, an associate professor in the Faculty of Dentistry and Medicine at Dalhousie University and research associate, Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre.



Marilyn Klein, Dalhousie University

**“Infants, children, and youth need calcium to ensure their teeth develop fully and well early in life”**

“Infants, children, and youth need calcium to ensure their teeth develop fully and well early in life,” says Dr. Mary McNally, an associate professor in the Faculty of Dentistry at Dalhousie University.

In addition, without enough calcium, kids may develop more cavities because their teeth are more susceptible to decay.

Calcium is also important for life-long health. “We naturally lose bone mass as we age. It’s extra important for older adults to meet their requirements for these nutrients,” says Dr. McNally, who recommends *Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide* as a helpful source of dietary information about calcium, vitamin D and phosphorus.

Even though adult teeth are no longer developing, they still need to be protected against decay. That’s what calcium can help to do. It also helps strengthen the jaw. Unfortunately, as we get older, the level of calcium in our body declines. A little boost is often needed.

The good news about calcium is that it is widely and deliciously available. Dairy products such as milk and cheese are excellent sources. If calcium is not a big part of your diet or you are lactose intolerant, calcium can be easily taken as a supplement. You’ll find it available in a wide variety of formats including pill form and as a chewable supplement.

The tricky thing about calcium,

however, is that it needs a little help to be absorbed into the body. That’s where Vitamin D and phosphorus play an important role.

#### **Vitamin D helps us absorb calcium**

Produced in our skin, Vitamin D requires ultraviolet light from the sun. This can be difficult to come by in seasonal northern climates like we have in Atlantic Canada. Also, because too much sun exposure presents a risk for skin cancer, many are opting to avoid lengthy exposure. Fortunately, Vitamin D is available as a supplement that can even be added to food.

On its own, Vitamin D does little for our teeth and bones. Combined with calcium, however, it does wonders. The vitamin acts as a catalyst so that our bones can more easily absorb calcium.

Research also indicates that Vitamin D may play an important role in controlling gum disease. It appears to do this in two ways. First, in tandem with calcium, Vitamin D helps teeth grow and become stronger. Second, it helps to reduce and soothe the inflammation caused by gum disease, or gingivitis. As well, Vitamin D helps keep teeth strong. If children, in particular, don’t get enough of the sunshine vitamin their teeth can

become susceptible to cavities and gum disease.



Courtesy of Health Canada



Yoga, for example, has a number of poses you can do easily and conveniently to give your mouth and jaw some exercise.

### Balance phosphorus and calcium

In many ways, phosphorus serves a similar—and important—purpose to Vitamin D. It works with calcium to build strong teeth and bones, such as your jaw. Without enough phosphorus, the calcium in your body will be wasted. Too little phosphorus also means your teeth are at greater risk of chipping and breaking.

Too often, however, the problem is not a lack of phosphorus in the body but an overabundance. Phosphorus is the most plentiful mineral in our body, and roughly 85 per cent of it is found in our teeth and bones. While diseases such as diabetes and celiac disease, as well as some medications, including diuretics, can affect the level of phosphorus in our body, most people usually get plenty of this mineral from such foods as milk and grains. It is not uncommon for our characteristic Canadian diet, rich in protein and bubbling with carbonated drinks, to have as much as 20 times more phosphorus than calcium. When this happens, the body takes calcium from elsewhere, such as our bones.

The more phosphorus you consume,

the more calcium is required. It's a balancing act necessary to ensure healthy teeth and bones.

### A work-out for your mouth

Just as you exercise to keep bones and body healthy, your mouth requires a work out. Exercising your jaw bone and the attached muscles helps to build new bone and keep existing bone strong. Yoga, for example, has a number of poses you can do easily and conveniently to give your mouth and jaw some exercise. Here's one to try:

#### The Lion

1. Sit in a comfortable position with your back arched slightly and your hands spread open on your legs.
2. Inhale deeply, then force air from your lungs.
3. Open your mouth and eyes as wide as possible.
4. Stick your tongue out of your mouth as far as it will go. Try reaching for your chin.
5. Count to 10 as you slowly bring your tongue back into your mouth.
6. Relax and repeat. 🐾



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# Fear of the dentist

A little prep work goes a long way to making it a positive experience



Kids need to understand that every time they visit the dentist, they're doing good things for their mouth and their overall health.

**With care** trips to the dentist don't have to be overwhelming for little ones.

The first step is to find out why your child is anxious. In some cases, it's because something hurt or startled them during a previous examination or treatment; sometimes it's because they've heard stories about other people's fear of the dentist or their painful experiences with an infected tooth or sore gums because of failure to visit a dentist.

"There is also the fear of the unknown. Children may be nervous if they have no knowledge of what is about to happen. Many children are also afraid of certain noises that may happen during a dental visit," says Dr. Jason Noel, a dentist in Bay Roberts NL, and president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Association.

## Show, tell and do

Your dentist can help alleviate these fears by using what is commonly called the 'show, tell and do technique'. The dentist, for example, will show the child an instrument, explain what will be done with it, and then use the instrument. In many cases, the dentist will alert the child about the sound an instrument will make and let the child hear the noise before the drill or other tool is used.

## Do your prep work

In advance of the visit, it's a good idea to prepare your child generally for a

trip to the dentist. Ask if there are any questions, and answer them simply and straightforwardly. In the absence of questions, explain why the child is going to the dentist and why it's important to have healthy gums and teeth.

"Let the dentist answer more complex or detailed questions," Dr. Noel recommends. "Dentists are trained to describe things to children in a non-threatening way and in easy-to-understand language."

What you don't want to do as an adult is inadvertently add to a child's discomfort and uncertainty. Sometimes the language used can create a ripple of fear. Words like "hurt," and "painful," for example, set up an expectation the visit will not be pleasant. So do statements like "Be a brave, girl," no matter how cheery the tone.

Then there is the one dread word that can make the heartiest little souls (and even big ones) quiver—*needle*. Adults may want to leave the opportunity for discussion for the dentist and the child.

However, if your son or daughter asks about needles, answer honestly. Let them know that dentists sometimes use needles to make little boys and girls more comfortable during their visit. You can let them know their cheek might tingle a little, and they want just might have a really cool drool for a few hours afterwards.

For younger kids who are going to the dentist for the first time or who have not been in some time, there are lots of books available that they can read. There is a whole series of *Berenstein Bears* books, but be forewarned: they do discuss getting teeth filled and pulled. Other titles to tempt little ones to learn more about their oral health and the dentist include *Dora Goes to the Dentist* featuring Dora the Explorer. Sticker activity books that focus on visiting the dentist are also available.

## Bring activity books

On the day of the visit, bring activity books for your child to read or toys to play with while waiting for the dentist or hygienist, and try to relax yourself. Kids

are amazing barometers. They register the tone around them and quickly cotton on that there is something making mom or dad nervous.

One other cause of fear often crops up when it's time to go the dentist's chair: leaving mom or dad behind. If it helps, a parent can accompany their child to the treatment room. Stand back though and let the dentist answer questions, explain what is happening and establish their own relationship with the child.

Children who are frightened can act out in a number of ways, everything from crying uncontrollably to throwing a temper tantrum. It's important to have a quiet, calm child for the examination, however. "Children and even adults that are fearful are less co-operative and can tend to be jumpy. It can interfere with the ability to examine and treat these patients," notes Dr. Noel.

Offering children a reward for going to the dentist is not effective. It reinforces the impression that going to the dentist is something out of the ordinary and kids deserve to be "paid" for accommodating the request. On the other hand, one successful approach



Bring activity books for your child to read or toys to play with while waiting for the dentist or hygienist.

to helping kids feel good about the visit is to give them a certificate when the examination is over. Parents can prepare this in advance (see the CDA's website where there is a certificate that can be printed out : [http://www.cda-adc.ca/en/oral\\_health/smile\\_certificate/default.asp](http://www.cda-adc.ca/en/oral_health/smile_certificate/default.asp)) and the dentist can present it when the little patient is leaving.

#### Make it part of the routine

Familiarity also breeds comfort. The more routine a visit to the dentist

becomes, as part of their routine health care, the less likely they are to be afraid when an appointment draws near. If, on the other hand, they only go to the dentist when there is a problem—a toothache or cavity that needs to be filled, they will come to associate the dentist with things that are unpleasant.

Ultimately, kids need to understand that every time they visit the dentist, they're doing good things for their mouth and their overall health. It's enough to make parents smile. 🍏

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# First tooth, first year, first visit

The benefits of introducing an infant to the dental environment



**Tooth** cavities, not colds, are the most common childhood disease. The incidence of early childhood cavities appears to be on the rise with recent research indicating that youngsters are getting more cavities at an earlier age. One study found that more than 25 per cent of children in North America have had at least one cavity by age four.

Cavities, or tooth decay, are caused by a bacterial infection linked to acid produced by food that sits on our teeth and between our teeth. Adults are quite familiar with cavities and the fillings that fix them. But children, even young children, are not immune from having tooth decay. In fact, says Dr.

Geoff Smith, a pediatric dentist in St. John's NL, roughly three per cent of all children will develop a cavity in early childhood.

That is one of the main reasons why both the Canadian Dental Association and the American Dental Association recommend children visit the dentist

by age one or by the arrival of their first tooth, whichever comes first. The visit will help achieve a number of important things.

First, it will enable the dentist to examine your child to see if there are any problems. It will also give you a chance to ask questions about a wide range of oral health-related issues—everything from the use of sippy cups to thumb sucking. That first visit is also a great time to introduce your child to the importance of oral health care and to help them become comfortable with visiting the dentist's office.

## Catch oral health problems early

The dentist will examine your child and may take x-rays to get a look below the surface. A history will also be taken so the dentist gets the broadest sense of what may be happening in your child's mouth—and more. Dr. Smith points out that some oral health conditions may be an indication of another medical problem. "Basically anything that you identify and fix can have an impact on long-term health," he says.

Some children, for instance, have a condition known as *enamel hypoplasia*, or "*chalk teeth*," which occurs when the tooth's enamel doesn't form completely. This may be a sign the child is not getting necessary nutrients in their diet or that another illness has been, or is, at play.

Children with significant tooth decay also tend to be in the lowest 10 per cent of the growth curve, and they often can't eat or sleep well. "Identifying that child will have an obvious impact (on their health)," notes Dr. Smith.

He points out that many of the





The dentist will examine your child and may take x-rays to get a look below the surface.

cavities in young children come from prolonged use of the bottle or sippy cup. There is a condition commonly called baby bottle tooth decay that occurs when infants and toddlers suck on a bottle of milk or juice over long periods. A domino effect happens: sugars in the beverages feed the bacteria that, in turn, produce acids that then attack the tooth's enamel. And that's when cavities are formed.

"The recommendation is that the baby bottle be discontinued by 12 months," says Dr. Smith.

The result is a healthier baby, he notes. "Removing the bottle or sippy cup from the equation will improve nutrition."

Cavities in young children are also linked to frequent ear infections, a result of the high sugar content of most antibiotics. If your child is prone to such infections, you may want to take the little one to the dentist before age one. Certainly discuss the infections with the dentist during your initial visit.

### Talk with your dentist

The opportunity for discussion is one of the main benefits of taking your child to the dentist by their first birthday. Dr. Smith, for example, makes it a point to talk about fluoride toothpaste and fluoride supplementation, diet, the health of the mouth's soft tissues and problems arising from thumb sucking or pacifier use. Other common topics include:

- How to best care for your child's mouth now and as they grow.
- How to prevent accidents that could damage the face and teeth.
- Teething and other growth signposts.

It's helpful to identify your questions before the visit to make sure nothing gets omitted or overlooked when you're with the dentist. The Canadian Dental Association notes that during the first visit you can also find out if the cleaning you do at home is working.

The first visit is also a milestone visit.

"This is an age where you normally don't expect to find a large number of problems and is a good time to begin the process of introducing the child to the dental environment," says Dr. Smith.

Many children are quite comfortable with that first visit. It's novel, and they have a loved one with them. In fact, many experts recommend two adults accompany the child. That way while mom or dad is speaking with the dentist, the little one is engaged and content. Likewise bringing a favourite toy is a good idea.

That way when the dentist says, "Open wide," even the youngest patients will feel at ease.

### Well positioned

For your child's first visit, the dentist may opt to use a technique called a knee-to-knee exam that lets both of you get a look inside the mouth.

This technique is done with you and the dentist sitting facing one another. Your child sits on your lap, looking at you. Then you lay the child down with their head in the dentist's lap. This way the dentist can now look directly into the child's mouth and you can also see inside as the dentist points things out. This position also allows the little one to see the face of a parent or other loved one as the dentist conducts the examination. 🍎



Richard Smith

## Dr. Smith points out that

some oral health conditions may be an indication of another medical problem. "Basically anything that you identify and fix can have an impact on long-term health"

# On guard!

An ounce of prevention can prevent a ton of pain



In almost all sport or physical activity, there is risk. In many cases, the mouth, jaw or teeth are affected. Mouth guards can reduce both the likelihood and the severity of injury.

**Depending** on the type and extent of the injury, a single blow to the mouth can result in months or even years of treatment—and no shortage of pain and discomfort.

In almost all sport or physical activity, there is risk. In many cases, the mouth, jaw or teeth are affected. Mouth guards can reduce both the likelihood and the severity of injury.

Here's why. "A properly fitted mouth guard will help to protect not only your teeth but your lips, tongue, cheeks, and jaw joint. The mouth guard cushions the impact and has even shown to reduce the severity of concussions," says Dr. Todd Rix, a dentist in Charlottetown whose office has been making mouth guards for the Charlottetown Islanders hockey team for six years.

"Studies have shown that athletes are up to 60 times more likely to suffer harm to their teeth when not wearing a mouth guard," he adds.

According to Health Canada, when you are hit in the mouth or jaw, a mouth guard acts as a buffer that redistributes the force of the blow, so the impact is absorbed more evenly. It also provides a barrier between the teeth

and the soft tissue in and around your mouth.

#### **More than just a mouth guard**

Not surprisingly, mouth guards help prevent chipped or broken teeth and protect lips and gums. They may do much more, however. Health Canada notes that some studies have found mouth guards may also help prevent concussion, bleeding from ruptured blood vessels in the brain, and neck injuries although the evidence is not definitive. Still, the Canadian Academy of Sport Medicine almost a decade ago took the official position that mouth guards should be worn

Dr. Todd Rix, a dentist in Charlottetown says “Studies have shown that athletes are up to 60 times more likely to suffer harm to their teeth when not wearing a mouth guard.”



while playing soccer for “the definite dental protection they provide and the possible role in concussion prevention.”

### Three types of mouth guards

Wear the correct mouth guard for you:

1. **Stock tray** mouth guards can be purchased from most sports stores. They are pre-made and come in a variety of sizes. All you have to do is open the package, and put the guard in your mouth.
2. **Boil-and-bite** mouth guards, which can be purchased at your local pharmacy, become pliable when heated. Once softened, you pop the guard in and it forms to the shape of your mouth and fits more closely over your teeth than a stock guard.
3. Finally, there are **custom made** guards that your dentist can prepare. These are molded specifically for your teeth and your mouth. Many experts recommend those.



Obviously, younger athletes, those from about age six to 13, will require custom mouth guards be changed more frequently as they have a mix of adult and baby teeth, and their mouths are changing. “This means that their mouth guards will probably need to be made new each year, and sometimes sooner,” says Dr. Rix. “You can always have the dentist check to see if your mouth guard still fits or is worn out.”

Most mouth guards are worn over the upper teeth only. However, for people with braces and other dental devices, a guard for the bottom teeth may also be helpful. There is also no lack of variety. “They come in different colours and combinations so can match your team’s colours,” says Dr. Rix.

And they are convenient. If you’re playing a sport or engaged in an activity that requires a helmet or headgear, mouth straps can be added

so your guard hangs loose when not in use and can be instantly popped in your mouth when required for play.

### Keep it clean

You will need to ensure the mouth guard is clean. This isn’t difficult; before and after each use, rinse the guard under cold water. You can also clean mouth guards easily with toothpaste and your toothbrush. Stay away from the automatic dishwasher though. “Many patients have tried to clean them in their dishwashers only to find a big ball of plastic,” says Dr. Rix.

He also recommends that mouth guards be stored in a perforated container to prevent distortion. “High temperatures can also distort them and cause them not to fit,” Dr. Rix notes.

Fit is critical. It’s what affords you the ultimate protection you want when you’re on the ice, on the field or anywhere else your activity could cause an injury or an accident.

### Not just for contact sports

Mouth guards aren’t just for pro athletes and extreme sports enthusiasts. Most team sports and some individual activities carry a risk of injury that mouth guards can help prevent.

“Most people think of contact sports like hockey or football, but any sport where there is a potential for a fall or to be hit by something, even individual sports like gymnastics or skateboarding,” will benefit from a mouth guard, says Dr. Todd Rix.

A sports mouthguard is also recommended for non-contact sports because mouth injuries can also occur unexpectedly in what may be considered fairly low-risk activities, such as:

- A blow to the face etc....
- A jaw and teeth injury caused by severe clenching of teeth in weight lifting.
- An inadvertent contact in basketball. 🍎



# Avoiding bad breath

One of the most common questions asked of dentists

**Looking** to dampen a romantic moment, an intimate conversation, or special kiss with the grandkids? Look no further than your breath.

It's among the top questions asked of dentists—but halitosis (bad breath) is a common and sometimes persistent condition that can be freshened in the short term and avoided longer term.

In most cases, the causes are simple and straightforward, but bad breath can also be an indication something is seriously wrong.

## The culprits

**Food.** What you put in your mouth will affect your breath in two ways. First, there are some foods that cause an unpleasant odour when you exhale—garlic and onions being the classic examples. As well, food that stays in your mouth because you haven't brushed or flossed in a while will collect bacteria, which also creates breath odour. Interestingly, eating too infrequently may also cause bad breath as dieters often discover.

**Oral bacteria.** Bad breath that persists may be an indication you have a problem with plaque, which causes gum disease. A cavity can also cause bad breath. Have your dentist take a look to see if there is a problem.

**Dry mouth.** When there is too little saliva in your mouth, food particles stick around and bad breath can result. Many medications cause dry mouth, and some medical conditions that promote breathing through the mouth can do the same. You're also likely to get a whiff of halitosis in the morning before you brush your teeth or if a long time passes between meals. Both are

instances where saliva flow has been reduced.

**Smoking.** This will come as no surprise, but tobacco isn't breath friendly. It dries the mouth and irritates some tissue.

**Unclean dentures.** Just like teeth, dentures require regular and thorough cleaning. When they're not fresh, your breath won't be either.

**Infection.** A throat, sinus or lung infection can cause bad breath.

**Medical conditions.** Some liver and kidney diseases cause bad breath. It can also be a warning sign of oral cancer and lesions in the mouth. Persistent bad breath should be discussed with your dentist.

## The treatment

For most bad breath, there is good news. It can be treated easily. Daily brushing and flossing are necessary to remove food particles and the bacteria that like to call your mouth home. Good brushing includes your tongue. Tongue scrapers are recommended by many dental professionals and can be purchased at your local pharmacy.



A mouthwash with antibacterial properties and no alcohol is also helpful to combat bad breath on short notice. For people with dry mouth, there are special saliva supplement rinses.

According to the New Brunswick Dental Society, you can do more than freshen bad breath, you can help to avoid it the first place. Here's how:

- Drink plenty of water to flush away bacteria and keep your mouth from getting too dry
- Use sugarless gum or candies to moisten your mouth and freshen your breath
- Use mouthwash before bedtime to kill bacteria

Bad breath is unpleasant, but it is not uncommon. As many as 75 per cent of Canadians fret about their breath at least once a day, the dental society reports. If it's on your worry list, talk with your dentist about the cause and what you can do to freshen your mouth. ●



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