

In between school, work
and play, do you make
time for your teeth?

If you don't, you could join the Americans who miss 2.5 million work days and 51 million school hours every year because of oral health problems.*

Fortunately, caring for your smile shouldn't take a lot of time out of your busy day. And routine, preventive care not only detects oral disease, but may also help to detect diseases like diabetes, heart disease, cancer and osteoporosis before signs show up in other parts of the body.*

Prevention is key! Brushing, flossing and visiting your dentist regularly are all essential for a healthy grin.

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Oral Care

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Insuring America's Dental Health

You've been exposed to good oral care all your life—from your parents, your teachers and your dentist. Sometimes, though, it's good to brush up on the basics.

Brush

The first key to good oral health is to **brush** your teeth as often as your dentist recommends. Most people brush at least twice a day. Also, check with your dentist and see if there's a right toothbrush for you—dentists often suggest a soft-bristled brush.

When it comes to technique, it's not how *hard* you brush, but *how* you brush. Be sure to reach all the surfaces between your teeth and gums, rather than just apply more pressure. To best reach the outsides and insides of your teeth, hold your toothbrush

at a 45-degree angle to your gums and use short back-and-forth motions. Hold the brush vertically to reach the backs of upper and lower front teeth. Use a back-and-forth motion to clean the crevices on the chewing surfaces of your teeth.

Removing food debris from your teeth ensures that sugar and acids don't wear down the enamel on your teeth, which leads to tooth decay. Don't forget to brush your tongue and the inside of your cheeks—both have pores where bacteria hide.

Floss

Second, use dental **floss** or an interdental cleaner every day. Flossing removes tooth-decay causing plaque from places that your toothbrush can't reach, as well as food debris that, if left between your teeth, causes bad breath and leads to gum disease. Be sure to rinse your mouth when you're finished flossing. Antibacterial mouthwashes may also help.

Visit Your Dentist

You also need professional care to maintain your oral health. If plaque is not removed regularly, it hardens and forms calculus. This irritant is a major cause of periodontal (gum) disease and tooth decay.

Visit your dental care provider regularly for professional cleanings and oral exams and inform your dentist immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms of gum disease:

- red, swollen or tender gums
- bleeding while brushing or flossing
- gums that pull away from the teeth and/or loose or separating teeth
- red, white or swollen areas in any part of your mouth
- persistent bad breath

Alert your dentist if you are diabetic, pregnant, receiving chemotherapy or taking medications for a chronic medical condition, or if there has been any change in your health. Your dentist can help you

manage oral conditions that may result from your medical condition.

Food for Thought and for Teeth

Certain foods can help and hurt your teeth. The acids in soft drinks coat your teeth's outer covering—the enamel—and can wear it away. Drink a soft drink in one sitting and rinse with water afterward to prevent it from breaking down the enamel.

Also, stay away from sticky foods like caramels, even potato chips, which fill in every nook and cranny in your teeth and are hard to remove. Foods like these can loosen any dental work you may have in your mouth.

Taking good care of your teeth and gums today can promote a healthy mouth and a healthy you tomorrow!

Additional related information can be found on the Web sites of the Academy of General Dentistry, www.agd.org and the American Dental Association, www.ada.org; and in Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2000.