

Fall 2005 Wellness Article

Oral Health

There's quite an interesting way to assess the quality of your overall health.

In fact, there are 32 ways. Your teeth and oral health are often good indicators of your general health. There are more reasons than ever to floss, brush, rinse, and spit.

Systemic diseases – those affecting the entire body – have a ninety percent chance of producing oral signs and symptoms. Your dentist and hygienist can monitor signs from a myriad of health problems including cancer, osteoporosis, diabetes, and AIDS. It is important to check not only the teeth and gums, but also the tongue, lips, inside of the cheek, palate, and the neck for abnormal lymph nodes and enlargement of the thyroid gland.

With regular checkups, your dentist or oral hygienist can alert you to any signs or symptoms of larger problems. Developing a healthy routine will also help to fight off the threats of heart disease and stroke.

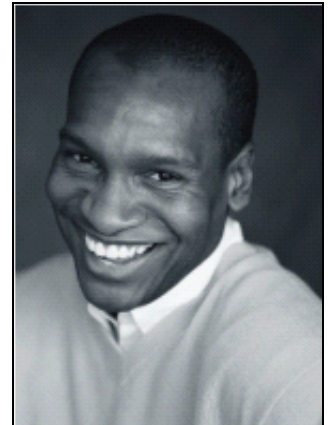
What does a healthy routine consist of? According to the American Dental Association (ADA), there are three necessary steps. The first is simply brushing often and properly. This means twice a day with an effective technique, and ensuring all teeth are cleaned.

Flossing is next, and equally important as it will clean all of the surfaces the toothbrush missed. With so many choices, including flat, expanding, round, flavored, easy glide, waxed, and textured it may seem overwhelming. Which one should you choose? Personal taste is a simple and safe bet in this case. If you have any specific concerns regarding dental work, ask your dentist for a recommendation.

Flossing will prevent plaque from forming between teeth and along the gum line. Without consistent flossing, the gums may pull away from your teeth, creating a space for bacteria to breed and possibly enter your bloodstream. This bacterial inflammation (gingivitis) may also affect the arteries. Studies have shown that patients with more significant tooth loss have a greater prevalence of carotid artery plaque¹, and that tooth loss is related to subclinical atherosclerosis.

The third step in maintaining a healthy smile is making a point to visit a dental professional on a regular basis. The recommendation of twice a year remains the standard for most people, but it's not a hardened rule. Some with immediate health risks such as weakened immune systems or current problems with gingivitis should schedule more frequent visits.

By taking a proactive approach to our oral health, we also make an investment in our overall health. Developing a healthy routine and adhering to it allows oral care to become second nature.



¹ American Academy of Family Physicians 2004 - The Oral Infections and Vascular Disease Epidemiology Study (INVEST)