

# Oral Health Tips for Adults

## Key points

Good oral health means good overall health, and the opposite. Adults can have oral health challenges throughout their lifetime. With proper steps, many oral health problems and diseases can be avoided.



## Overview

Adults can develop oral health problems throughout their lifetime. Oral health problems can include [cavities](#), [gum disease](#), [tooth loss](#), and [oral cancer](#). More than 40% of adults report having felt pain in their mouth within the last year,<sup>1</sup> and more than 80% of people will have had at least one cavity by age 34.

During pregnancy, you may be more likely to have cavities and gum disease. People with chronic disease, such as arthritis, diabetes, or heart disease may have an increased risk of having missing teeth and poor oral health.<sup>2</sup>

Oral health problems also increase with age because of problems with saliva production, receding gums, and difficulties flossing and brushing due to poor vision, cognitive problems, chronic disease, and physical limitations.

## What You Can Do

Good oral health = good overall health

To maintain a healthy mouth and strong teeth:

- **Don't use tobacco products.** [If you smoke, quit.](#) The more you smoke or come into contact with smoke, the higher your risk of developing cancer.
- **Drink less alcohol.** The more alcohol you drink, the higher your risk of head and neck cancer. If you drink, [do so in moderation](#) to lower your risk.
- **Get vaccinated.** Human papillomavirus (HPV) can infect the mouth and throat and cause cancer. Ask your doctor if you need to be vaccinated against HPV to possibly prevent throat cancer.
- **Manage your diabetes.** If you have [diabetes](#), you may need to get your teeth cleaned multiple times a year, which may help lower your blood sugar level. Managing your diabetes will also lower your risk of other oral health complications, including gum disease.
- **Prevent dry mouth.** If your medication makes your mouth feel dry, ask your doctor for a different medication that may not cause this condition. If this doesn't help, drink plenty of water, chew sugarless gum, don't smoke or use tobacco products, and don't drink alcohol.
- **Act on any new symptoms.** Talk to your doctor or dentist if you have sudden changes in taste and smell.

Daily care

- **Avoid food and drinks with added sugar** as much as possible. They contribute to oral diseases and other chronic diseases.
- Drink **fluoridated tap water** and brush your teeth with **fluoride toothpaste**.
- Practice **good oral hygiene**. Brush your teeth well twice a day and floss between your teeth to remove dental plaque.
- Wear a **mouthguard** when participating in contact sports or high-risk activities.

Yearly care

- **Visit your dentist** at least once a year, even if you wear dentures and have lost some or all of your teeth. Your dentist will check your mouth for cancers, oral health problems, and cavities.

## Tips for Pregnant Women

When you're pregnant, gum disease and cavities can affect your baby's health. Brush your teeth twice a day and floss every day. Visit your dentist at least once before you deliver, especially if you have any tooth pain or sensitivity.

If you have nausea and vomit, mix 1 teaspoon of baking soda with a glass of water, swish, and then spit it out. This helps wash stomach acid away and keeps the outer part of your tooth (enamel) safe.

## Tips for Older Adults

In addition to the Tips for Adults outlined above, older adults, especially those who are homebound and/or institutionalized in care centers, can:

- **Ask your dentist** for other ideas, prescriptions, or supplies to help you brush or floss to prevent cavities.
- **Clean dentures daily.** Wearing dentures could put you at risk for fungal infections in your mouth. If you can, remove your dentures all night and clean them daily.
- If you **have a caregiver**, they can help you brush and floss if you struggle to do this well by yourself.