



Make Oral Health a Priority

Making oral health a priority in your household can pay dividends in a number of ways, both today and for years to come.

We often take our oral health for granted. Good oral health, however, enhances our ability to speak, smile, smell, taste, touch, chew, swallow, and convey our emotions through facial expressions. All of these things have a big impact on how we perform at school, work or in social situations. And they all have an influential role in quality of life.

Taking care of oral health on a routine basis from an early age can help you and your family avoid oral diseases later in life, too. Most consumers today understand the connection between oral health and overall health. In fact, many common infectious and chronic diseases—including HIV, herpes, chickenpox, mononucleosis, diabetes, Crohn's disease, leukemia, heart disease, kidney disease, cancer, and many others—have oral symptoms that can be detected during an oral exam by your dentist.

Oral Health Problems are Costly and Painful

If basic oral health practices aren't followed, the resulting problems can become costly. Oral diseases range from

cavities to cancer. These disorders cause pain and disability for millions of Americans each year.

Here are examples from statistics compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Tooth decay affects more than a quarter of U.S. children aged two to five years and half of those aged 12 to 15 years. About half of all children and two-thirds of adolescents aged 12 to 19 years from lower-income families have had decay.
- Children and adolescents of some racial and ethnic groups and those from lower-income families have more untreated tooth decay. For example, 40 percent of Mexican American children aged 6 to 8 years have untreated decay, compared with 25 percent of non-Hispanic whites.
- Advanced gum disease affects 4% to 12% of U.S. adults. Half of the cases of severe gum disease in the United States are the result of cigarette smoking. The prevalence of gum disease is three times higher among smokers than among people who have never smoked.
- A quarter of U.S. adults age 65 or older have lost all of their teeth.

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- More than 7,800 people, mostly older Americans, die from oral and pharyngeal cancers each year. This year, about 36,500 new cases of oral cancer will be diagnosed.¹

Most Oral Disease is Preventable

The good news about dealing with oral disease is that it is mostly preventable. The key is to initiate basic practices early in life and follow them daily.

For infants:

- Wipe your infant's gums with a wet washcloth even before the first tooth erupts and then with a soft infant toothbrush after meals once teeth are present.
- If the baby needs a bottle or sippy cup at bedtime, fill it with water—not milk, juice, or soft drinks.
- Take your child for his or her first dentist visit by age one or within six months after the first tooth appears. This is an opportunity to get advice from your dentist on early oral development and care, and to begin your child's familiarization with going to the dentist. Remember that tooth decay can start as soon as teeth erupt into the mouth.

For older children:

- Make sure they brush carefully with a fluoride toothpaste, for at least two minutes, twice a day. Up to about age eight, most children will need help from an adult or older sibling with proper brushing technique. They should get some supervision even after that age.
- Make sure they drink fluoridated water. Many municipal systems add fluoride to the water, but some don't. Also, bottled water has become popular, but it's important to select brands that contain fluoride.
- Floss daily, again with adult help.
- Ask your dentist if sealants are appropriate once the permanent molars erupt around age six.

For adults:

- Set a good example and follow the brush-and-floss routine yourself. Remember, children learn from their parents. You'll teach youngsters valuable skills and improve your oral health as well.
- Make sure the entire family eats a healthy diet; in particular, limit sugary foods and beverages.
- Schedule regular dental checkups for the entire family. Most oral problems are preventable or easily repairable if caught early.

Rely on Your Dental Benefits

Beyond following the fundamentals at home, one of the most important elements of oral health care is to develop and maintain a relationship with your dentist. As a Delta Dental subscriber, you have a powerful team at your service to help make that happen.

While medical care typically focuses on treating disease and illness, regular dental care concentrates on prevention, usually through low-cost checkups and cleanings, as well as fluoride and sealants if needed.

Dental benefits work because most dental disease is preventable. Delta Dental benefit plans are designed to be prevention-oriented. Restorative services are provided only when signs of more advanced dental disease are detected.

Dental benefits are cost-effective because early detection and treatment of problems such as cavities or gum disease reduces treatment costs. That's why most plans encourage subscribers to visit the dentist regularly.

Our dental networks benefit consumers in several important ways. Member dentists contract with Delta Dental to provide high-quality, affordable dental care.

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Oral Health Program, Strategic Plan for 2011–2014.*

