

# *YOUR* Oral Health *& Overall Wellness*

*Speaking, smiling, laughing, tasting, chewing and swallowing—these everyday functions are linked to your oral and overall health.*



Your oral health encompasses more than strong and healthy teeth. It also refers also

to the condition of your upper and lower jaws, your gums and supporting tissues, chewing muscles, the roof of your mouth, all linings of the mouth and throat, your tongue and lips, and salivary glands.

The branches of your nervous, immune, and vascular systems all play their roles in protecting, nourishing, and moving these parts and connecting them to the brain and rest of the body.

Given these connections, it's easy to see that your oral health is essential to your general health and well-being. There are links, as well, between chronic oral infections and various medical conditions.



These include:

- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Respiratory disease
- Stroke
- Low birth-weight/premature babies

Taking care of your teeth and gums benefits far more than your smile. Your mouth, after all, is a gateway to your body. What you put in your mouth—food, drink, medications and tobacco products—impacts your overall health.

There's also a connection between the mouth and mind. Self-image and self-esteem can be impacted by oral health

conditions such as a birth defect, chronic pain, cold sores, oral yeast infections, and cancer. These conditions can interfere with normal daily activities and result in lost productivity, stress, and even depression.

With so many connections between your oral health and overall well-being, it's not too surprising that the mouth has been called a "mirror" to what's happening inside your body.

One of the most important linkages between your oral health and overall wellness is the health of your gums. The American Dental Association and other research groups have found that periodontitis (the

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advanced form of gum disease that can cause tooth loss) is linked with cardiovascular disease, stroke, pneumonia, and other health conditions. Pregnant women with advanced gum disease may be at increased risk of delivering pre-term and/or low birth-weight infants.

Blame it on the sticky bacterial plaque that builds up on your teeth; and tender inflamed, bleeding gums. Researchers believe that oral bacteria from gum disease can escape into the bloodstream and impact or injure major organs.

To keep plaque under control, brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, floss daily, and maintain your dental appointments. This simple oral health regime is so much easier than dealing with complications arising from ignoring one's oral health.

One more tip: Replace your toothbrush every three months, or more often if the bristles are matted or frayed. Replace it after

## Did you know?

- **Oral health** can impact self-esteem, school performance, and attendance at work and school. Oral diseases—ranging from cavities to gum disease to oral cancer—cause pain and disability for millions of Americans.
- **Cavities (tooth decay)** are one of the most common chronic diseases in the United States. By age 34, more than 80% of people have had at least one cavity. In 2015, more than 40% of adults felt pain in their mouth. The nation spends more than \$124 billion a year on costs related to dental care.
- On average, over **34 million school hours** are lost and over \$45 billion is lost in productivity each year due to unplanned (emergency) dental care.



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov)

you've been sick, too – because a toothbrush can hold onto germs even after rinsing it. It's a start, but one worth smiling about. 🦷

FYI: More information on oral health and wellness can be found online at the TRICARE Dental Program's (TDP) Dental Health Center ([uccitdp.com](http://uccitdp.com)), the Academy of General Dentistry ([agd.org](http://agd.org)), and American Dental Association ([ada.org](http://ada.org)).

## Fact sheets in United Concordia's oral health series:



• Fluoride & Your Oral Health



• Oral Health: Infant to Teen



• Oral Health & Your Overall Wellness



• Oral Health for Kids with Special Needs



• Preventive Oral Care for Everyone



• Your Oral Health & Diabetes



• Your Oral Health & Heart Disease



• Your Oral Health & Lupus



• Your Oral Health & Oral Cancer



• Your Oral Health & Organ Transplants



• Your Oral Health & Rheumatoid Arthritis



• Your Oral Health & Pregnancy

Download fact sheets from TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) Dental Health Center: [uccitdp.com](http://uccitdp.com)