Big smiles

Aetna Dental® plans
A healthier body starts with dental health

Your mouth matters — more than you may know

A nice smile can brighten your appearance. But good dental health also helps keep your mouth in better shape. That means fewer cavities, stronger teeth and less chance of gum disease.

Research shows that caring for your teeth and gums may be important to your overall health. What goes on in your mouth can affect the rest of your body. At the same time, what goes on in your body can affect your mouth.

Here's what your dental professional looks for during your oral exam:

- ✔ Anything unusual in your mouth tissues
- ✔ Gum disease — early gingivitis and advanced periodontitis
- ✔ Cavities, restorations like crowns or bridges, and other tooth conditions

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The mouth-body connection

We conducted studies with the Columbia University College of Dental Medicine. Our goal? To understand the connection between infections in the mouth and their impact on other parts of the body. We learned how taking care of teeth and gums may be important to overall health.

Sometimes, the first signs of general health problems show up in the mouth.[1] And a dental professional can spot signs of many of them.

For members with both our medical and dental plans, benefits work together for better overall health and value. We reach out to members when research reveals they could benefit from extra dental care. We encourage them to visit a dentist to benefit their overall health.

Tooth tip: Schedule regular oral exams with your dentist.

Sticking to a recommended exam schedule can help spot:

- ✔ Infections
- ✔ Immune disorders
- ✔ Injuries
- ✔ Osteoporosis
- ✔ Eating disorders
- ✔ Malnutrition
- ✔ Some cancers

With good dental care, you can:

- Cut your risk of heart disease
- Lower your risk of a stroke
- Help control your blood sugar
- Lower the chance of early delivery during pregnancy
- Help lower your risk of rheumatoid arthritis

[1]The University of Illinois at Chicago College of Dentistry. What can my dentist tell me about my overall health? February 8, 2018. Available at: Dentistry.UIC.edu/Patients/Oral-Health-Overall-Health. Accessed October 2019.

A healthier mouth can help you have a healthier life

With certain common dental conditions, there could be other issues, too. Your dentist can help spot:

Gum disease

This is an infection of the tissues that hold the teeth in place. It usually begins when bacteria that aren't properly removed during brushing and flossing inflame the gums. Stages include:

· **Gingivitis**: Early gum disease. If left untreated, it can become a serious infection and destroy your gums and tissues surrounding the teeth.

· **Periodontitis**: More advanced gum disease. Infection may lead to the loss of bone around the teeth and to tooth loss. And the damage may not stop in the mouth. Research suggests that periodontitis may be associated with many health problems. The inflammation associated with periodontitis may complicate diseases in other parts of the body. This is especially true if serious gum disease continues without treatment.[2]

Diabetes

With diabetes, you're more likely to develop mouth and gum conditions than people without diabetes.[3] And bad breath or bleeding gums may be the first signs of diabetes. If you have diabetes, you also may develop:

· Dry mouth, which may increase tooth decay

· Receding gums, especially if your diabetes is not well managed[4]

Treating the gums can help make diabetes easier to control.[5]

Heart disease

This is the leading cause of death for Americans. And people with periodontitis may be more likely to have heart attacks or strokes. Bacteria may enter the bloodstream through the mouth and attach to fatty deposits in the blood vessels, which may contribute to heart disease.[2] Another theory is that the inflammation associated with periodontitis may play a role.[2]

Seeing your dentist regularly might be one of the best defenses against these illnesses.

Oral cancer

Regular dental checkups also help detect signs of oral cancer early on. If a warning sign is found, a more complete examination is needed. Your dentist may suggest and explain how to conduct a monthly self-exam.

You can find more oral cancer information at:

Cancer.gov

ADHA.org

CDC.gov/oralhealth/topics/cancer.htm

Dental issues during pregnancy

Pregnancy causes changes to the body, sometimes in the mouth. These changes may affect your overall health and the health of your unborn baby. During a dental exam, your dentist will look for:

· **Pregnancy gingivitis**: Pregnancy hormones can make your gums red or swollen. They may even bleed. Your dentist can give you a home-care program to help control this condition.

· **Serious gum disease**: Periodontitis may produce a chemical in the body that may cause early labor. Visiting your dentist while pregnant can help spot a problem, and treatment can begin right away.

· **Tooth enamel wear**: If you get frequent morning sickness, stomach acids can wear down your tooth enamel. Your dentist can give you a fluoride mouth rinse to help fight the effects. Morning sickness also may cause appetite loss. This may lead to poor nutrition. A prescription vitamin or supplement can help.

[2]American Academy of Periodontology. Periodontal disease and systemic health. Available at: Perio.org/ Consumer/Gum-Disease-and-Other-Diseases. Accessed October 2019.

[3]American Academy of Periodontology. Diabetes and periodontal disease. Available at: Perio.org/Consumer/ Gum-Disease-and-Diabetes.htm. Accessed October 2019.

[4]American Academy of Periodontology. Gum disease symptoms. Available at: Perio.org/Consumer/ Gum-Disease-Symptoms.htm. Accessed October 2019.

[5]BMC Oral Health. The effect of periodontal therapy on glycemic control and fasting plasma glucose level in type 2 diabetic patients: systematic review and meta-analysis. 2016. Available at: BMCOralhealth.Biomedcentral.com/ articles/10.1186/s12903-016-0249-1/open-peer-review. Accessed October 2019.

	Simple actions for a healthier mouth		
Tooth tip: Develop a healthier daily routine.	Brush twice a day.*	Floss after brushing.	Rinse twice a day with an antiseptic mouthwash.
	Eat healthy foods.	Exercise regularly.	Stop smoking.

Your good health starts today

Keeping your mouth healthy means keeping you healthy. So be sure to visit your dental professional regularly. If you don't have an appointment, it's easy to schedule one. We can help you find qualified and affordable dentists near you and help you manage your dental benefits.

You can find dentists and helpful tools to manage your dental health and benefits:

✔ Online — visit your member website at **Aetna.com** to create an account and log in.

✔ Mobile — text "DENTAL" to 90156 for a link to download the Aetna Health℠ app (message and data rates apply).**

✔ Or call Member Services at the toll-free number on your digital ID card, located on your member website at **Aetna.com**.

Schedule your dental checkup today for whole-body health tomorrow

*Choose a toothpaste that contains fluoride and an antibacterial ingredient. Also make sure the toothpaste carries the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance.

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