

Dental caries and oral health: How much do you know?



Oral health encompasses the condition of your mouth, including teeth, gums, tongue, and the entire oral cavity. It's not only about having a bright smile but also about maintaining the functionality and overall health of these components.

Dental caries is a common chronic infection, resulting from tooth-adherent cariogenic bacteria which metabolise sugars to produce acid, demineralising the tooth structure over time. This demineralisation process weakens the tooth's structure and can lead to the formation of cavities or holes in the tooth.

Causes and symptoms:

Poor oral hygiene, consumption of sugary and acidic foods and beverages, infrequent dental check-ups, and inadequate fluoride intake are some of the primary factors contributing to the development of dental caries. In the early stages, dental caries might not cause noticeable symptoms. As the decay progresses, symptoms can include tooth sensitivity, pain, visible holes or pits in the teeth, and dark spots.

Read more:

<https://www.msmanuals.com/professional/dental-disorders/common-dental-disorders/caries#v950051>



Importance of oral health:

Oral health is linked to general health. Poor oral health can contribute to various systemic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and respiratory issues.

Proper oral hygiene practices can help prevent common dental problems like cavities (dental caries), gum disease, and tooth loss. It can also increase the quality of life, as good oral health allows people to speak, eat and interact comfortably. Dental issues can affect self-esteem and quality of life.

Key elements of oral health:

- Oral hygiene:** Regular brushing and flossing are crucial to remove food particles and plaque from teeth and gums, thereby preventing cavities and gum disease.
- Diet and nutrition:** A balanced diet rich in vitamins and minerals is essential for healthy teeth and gums. Limiting sugary and acidic foods and drinks helps prevent tooth decay.
- Regular dental check-ups:** Routine visits to the dentist enable early detection and treatment of dental problems. Dental professionals can also guide proper oral care.
- Fluoride:** Fluoride strengthens tooth enamel and helps prevent tooth decay. It's often found in toothpaste, water and some dental treatments.
- Avoiding tobacco:** Do not use tobacco products, including smokeless tobacco. If you currently use tobacco, consider quitting.
- If you have diabetes:** Take particular care to control your condition. This will decrease the risk of other complications, including gum disease. Treating gum disease may also help to lower your blood sugar levels.



Common oral health issues:

Gum disease: Also known as periodontal disease, affects the gums and can lead to gum recession, bad breath and tooth mobility.

Oral cancer: Early detection is crucial for successful treatment. Regular dental check-ups include screenings for oral cancer.

Bad breath (Halitosis): Often caused by poor oral hygiene or underlying health issues. Bad breath can negatively affect social interactions.

For more information:

<https://www.webmd.com/oral-health/ss/slideshow-tooth-problems>

Maintaining oral health:

- Brush your teeth at least twice a day, using fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss daily to clean between teeth and below the gumline.
- Eat a balanced diet, rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and dairy products.
- Limit sugary snacks and beverages.
- Drink plenty of water and avoid tobacco and alcohol.
- Visit your dentist for regular check-ups and cleanings.

Oral health is directly linked to your overall health. Poor oral health has been linked to various systemic conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and respiratory infections. Maintaining good oral hygiene practices and seeking regular professional dental care are essential for promoting overall health and wellbeing.