

# Oral health is about more than your mouth.



Making your oral health a priority can safeguard your overall health and well-being. That's because many oral diseases can influence health conditions outside the mouth and vice versa. Here's why it's so important to maintain a healthy smile.

## Your mouth and body are connected

Your mouth is full of many kinds of microorganisms, including bacteria. Thankfully, most of them are harmless, and practicing good oral hygiene can help reduce the amount of bad bacteria in your mouth. Bad bacteria can create acids and cause inflammation that lead to tooth decay and periodontal (gum) disease. Bacteria from gum disease and inflammation in your mouth can influence other diseases and health conditions throughout your body.

## Overall health issues are linked to your mouth

**Gum disease** — especially in its advanced stage — has been linked to a higher risk of:

- ✓ Heart disease and stroke
- ✓ Respiratory diseases like bronchitis and pneumonia
- ✓ Diabetes
- ✓ Osteoporosis
- ✓ Bacterial pneumonia

Researchers continue to investigate connections between gum disease and other diseases. For instance, some research suggests a connection between mouth bacteria and the development of **Alzheimer's disease**. A large number of studies have also shown a potential association between gum disease and **autoimmune diseases**, such as rheumatoid arthritis and [lupus](#).

In addition, more severe gum disease in pregnant women may be a risk factor for delivering a **premature or low-birth-weight baby**. [Research suggests](#) that people with gum disease are more likely to die from heart disease or stroke than those without periodontal disease.

## Gum disease and overall health issues intensify each other

Not only is gum disease more frequent and often more severe in **diabetics**, but it can also make it more difficult for diabetics to control their blood sugar. Treating gum disease can help diabetics better manage their blood sugar levels.

In addition to diabetes, other diseases such as **HIV infections, AIDS, and blood cell disorders like anemia** can make it more difficult for the body to fight infection, resulting in more severe gum disease.

### Other health conditions that can damage oral health

- ✓ **Sjogren's syndrome** is an immune system disorder that leads to cavity-causing dry mouth.
- ✓ **Eating disorders** can cause many oral health problems, including bleeding, dry mouth, brittle teeth, and more.
- ✓ People with **mental health issues** are more likely to have oral health problems. This is most often due to poor **diet** and neglect of regular oral health care.
- ✓ **Osteoporosis** can lead to tooth loss when the jawbone becomes less dense.

### How you can protect your oral and overall health

You can help prevent health issues with a regular at-home oral health routine, including:

- ✓ Brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and a soft-bristled toothbrush for two minutes each time
- ✓ Flossing daily
- ✓ Replacing your toothbrush or toothbrush head every three to four months or sooner if your bristles fray or spread out
- ✓ Eating a healthy, balanced diet that limits sugary and starchy foods and drinks

Be sure to schedule regular dental visits. Your dentist can uncover oral problems such as mouth lesions or infections that may be the first sign of an underlying health problem.