2014 Oral Health and Well-Being Survey
Shining a Spotlight on Oral Health’s Connection to Overall Well-Being

As the leading brand of dental coverage in the United States, Delta Dental covers the smiles of 62 million Americans. We know firsthand the importance of oral health and its connection to overall well-being.

To shine a spotlight on these important topics, we commissioned a national public opinion poll. Working with Morpace, an independent market research firm, we surveyed 1,003 adults across the United States. This sample size yields a margin of error of ±3.1 percent at a 95 percent confidence level.

We asked Americans about their opinions and their habits related to oral health. We explored topics both serious and light-hearted. And, we analyzed the results to uncover connections between oral health and overall well-being.

Here’s what we found:

- Good oral health is strongly linked with overall well-being.
- Dental coverage contributes to dental visits, which are linked to good oral health. Americans’ dental habits, including regular dental visits and flossing, could be improved.
- Oral health issues and educational opportunities persist today.
Americans report their oral health as strong. In fact, four of five Americans (81 percent) rate their oral health as good, very good or excellent – about the same number (83 percent) rate their overall well-being similarly.

Further analysis of the data suggests a significant correlation between strong oral health and strong overall well-being. Americans are nearly twice as likely to report their overall well-being as good or better if they report their oral health as good or better.

**Overall Oral Health**

- **Poor**: 6%
- **Fair**: 13%
- **Good**: 31%
- **Very good**: 35%
- **Excellent**: 15%

**% Reporting Overall Well-Being as Good or Better**

- Americans who report oral health as good or better
- Americans who report oral health as fair or poor
Unresolved Oral Health Issues

While most Americans report good oral health, more than one of four Americans (27 percent) report unresolved oral health issues. Those with issues cite cost (62 percent) and fear of the procedure (23 percent) as top reasons for not having treatment.

Have Unresolved Oral Health Issues

- No: 73%
- Yes: 27%

Oral Health and Overall Health Connection

Americans understand a general connection between oral health and overall health, but they lack understanding of specific connections. For example, just over half of adults (55 percent) realize there’s a connection between heart disease and gum disease, and only 44 percent are aware of the connection between diabetes and gum disease.

Agreement with:

- Connection between oral health and overall health: 83% strongly agree/agree, 15% agree, 2% neutral.
- Connection between heart disease and gum disease: 55% strongly agree/agree, 40% agree, 5% neutral.
- Connection between diabetes and gum disease: 44% strongly agree/agree, 51% agree, 5% neutral.
While dental visit habits are generally good, most Americans admit to taking time off from regular checkups at some point in their lives. In fact, almost half of Americans (47 percent) have gone three or more years without seeing a dentist.

Nearly two of three Americans (65 percent) visit the dentist at least once a year. Americans with dental coverage are much more likely to have regular dental visits than those who lack coverage.

Dental Visits in America

% Visiting the Dentist at Least Once a Year

Longest Time Gone Without Seeing a Dentist

- Less than 1 year: 28%
- 1-2 years: 25%
- 3-4 years: 22%
- 5-10 years: 12%
- More than 10 years: 12%

Note: The sum of the non-rounded numbers for responses of three or more years is 47 percent.
Dental Anxiety

About six of ten Americans (58 percent) indicate some fear or reluctance in visiting the dentist. Of those who say they have fear or reluctance, concerns about additional care and cost of that care are most frequently cited. Still, despite the fear or reluctance that many Americans feel about visiting the dentist, more feel refreshed (57 percent) than relieved (43 percent) after a dental visit.

Fear/Reluctance to Visit Dentist?

- No 42%
- Yes, very much 26%
- Yes, some fear/reluctance 32%

Concerns about Visiting Dentist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You are afraid to find out what oral care you might need.</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can’t afford the care.</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are afraid of shots that may be needed for numbing.</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You feel helpless or lacking control when a dentist is working on you.</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You had a bad past experience.</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The dentist is not caring or sensitive.</td>
<td>17%</td>
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</table>
Most Americans brush their teeth twice or more a day. Still, nearly one-third of Americans (31 percent) do not, which means they aren’t brushing enough. On average, Americans brush their teeth for 112 seconds compared to the recommended 120 seconds.

Nearly six of 10 Americans brush their teeth as soon as they get up in the morning and at bedtime.
More than one of five Americans (23 percent) has gone two or more days without brushing their teeth in the past year.

**Longest Gone Without Brushing**
*(Past Year)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 hours</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 hours</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 days</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 days</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7 days</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer than a week</td>
<td>3%</td>
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Only four of 10 Americans (41 percent) floss at least once daily (the recommended frequency), and 20 percent never floss.

**Frequency of Flossing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least once a day</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a week</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a month</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a year</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</table>

Note: Total of 101 percent is a function of rounding.
Dental Coverage is Linked with Overall Well-Being

Dental Coverage

Adults with dental coverage are 50 percent more likely to visit the dentist at least once a year.

Dental Visits

Adults who visit the dentist once a year are 37 percent more likely to report good or better oral health.

Oral Health

Adults who report good oral health are almost twice as likely to report good or better overall well-being.
It’s the Smile

According to the Delta Dental Oral Health and Well-Being survey, a smile is the most important physical feature that contributes to a person’s attractiveness. And, more than six of 10 Americans (64 percent) say a smile has some bearing on a person’s overall success.

More than six of 10 Americans (64 percent) say they like their smile, and almost a third (31 percent) wouldn’t change a thing about it. The fact that most Americans like their smiles is a good sign, and Delta Dental is committed to providing access to great oral health care and education so Americans can continue to feel good about their own personal smiles.

For more results from the Delta Dental Oral Health and Well-Being Survey, visit deltadental.com.