

12 Ways to save money and your teeth

1. Floss every day. Flossing removes plaque and debris that stick to teeth and gums between your teeth. Plaque is a soft, sticky accumulation that occurs on teeth and gum tissue. It is the host to a complex system of microorganisms including bacteria which cause inflammatory diseases of the gingiva called gingivitis and periodontitis or gum disease. If plaque is left on the teeth it increases in mass and thickness and the number and types of bacteria increase. Gingivitis is a result of increased plaque and results in swollen and red gums that bleed easily. If plaque continues to accumulate mineral salts are deposited into the plaque and calculus is formed. With the formation of calculus, periodontitis or gum disease can take hold. Calculus cannot be removed by brushing or flossing requiring a visit to the dentist to be removed. Accumulation of plaque also leads to caries (cavities).

2. Brush your teeth twice a day. Brushing your teeth twice per day, once after breakfast and once before going to bed removes plaque and food debris from our teeth preventing caries, gingivitis, periodontitis or gum disease and bad breath. It is important to use toothpaste that contains fluoride and has the American Dental Association seal of approval.

3. Use a soft toothbrush. It is important to use a soft toothbrush to avoid causing wear at the necks of our teeth. A medium or hard toothbrush can be very destructive to our teeth especially if coupled with a strong vigorous sawing brushing action. It is important to brush with gentle circular motions to avoid causing undesired wear which lead to sensitivity and the need for dental restorations or fillings.

4. Drink less pop. Pop contains acid. This acid attacks your teeth and causes demineralization which weakens your teeth and makes them porous and provided a place for cariogenic bacteria to take hold. Each acid attack lasts about 20 minutes. After 20 minutes your saliva buffers the acid attack and starts the process of remineralizing your teeth. The acid attack starts over with every sip of pop. In addition to decay or cavities or caries, drinking a lot of pop has been linked to diabetes, obesity and osteoporosis. All the calories in pop come from sugar. There is no nutritional value in pop.

5. Eat less candy. Candy contains sugar which is fuel for the bacteria which causes cavities. Nowadays candy is not only sweet but it is also sour. Extreme or intense sour and fruity flavors have added another popular source of dietary acid and this is contributing to the prevalence of erosion or melting teeth in addition to decay.

6. Chew sugarless gum. Make sure you are chewing sugarless gum to avoid providing sugar which allows cariogenic bacteria to produce cavities. Even better chew gum flavored with 100% Xylitol. Xylitol is a natural sweetener found in plants and fruits. Pure xylitol is a white crystalline substance that looks and taste like sugar but has 40% fewer calories. Xylitol is used in sugar-free gum and mints. Xylitol has been shown to inhibit the growth of *Streptococcus mutans*, the oral bacteria that causes cavities.

7. Get your cavities filled. When caries has been detected it is more inexpensive to have the tooth restored to prevent the caries from getting larger, which could lead to more extensive and expensive treatments, and not treating cavities can lead to infecting other teeth with caries as well.

8. Treat gum disease. If your dentist has determined that you have gum disease it is important to have the gum disease treated and to maintain your 3 month cleaning schedule to prevent tooth loss and more expensive treatments to replace missing teeth.

9. Quit smoking. In addition to the harm smoking can cause to our lungs it is also a risk factor for periodontal disease and oral cancer.

10. Wear your retainer or night guard. If you had braces, you were given a retainer to hold your teeth in place. If you do not wear your retainer your teeth will move again and you will need to get braces again to straighten your teeth. If your dentist has prescribed a night guard for grinding or clenching wearing your night guard every night will prevent wear and stress on your teeth.

11. Visit your dentist every 6 months for exam and cleaning. Regular exams can spot problems when they are small and therefore more inexpensive to fix. Regular cleanings help to prevent plaque and calculus buildup which can lead to decay and periodontal or gum disease.

12. Start your kids early on all of the above. As many parents know kids are our biggest expense. Taking them to the dentist as early as age 3, insuring that they get regular checkups and instilling these habits at a young age can insure good dental health and reduce the need for extensive dental procedures.

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