

Oral Hygiene

Personal care

Careful and frequent toothbrushing and flossing help to prevent build-up of plaque and calculus (tartar), which can lead to cavities. Cavities can be costly, in terms of the monetary cost to drill out the cavities and insert dental fillings, and in terms of the tissue already damaged.

Chewing gum assists oral irrigation between and around the teeth, cleaning and removing particles. For teeth in poor condition it may damage or remove loose fillings as well.

The teeth should be brushed after every meal and at bedtime, and flossed at least once per day, preferably at night before you brush and go to sleep. For some people, flossing might be recommended after every meal. A dentist or dental hygienist can instruct and demonstrate oral hygiene's proper brushing and flossing techniques.

Special appliances or tools may be recommended to supplement (but not to replace) toothbrushing and flossing. These include special toothpicks, water irrigation, or other devices. Initially electric toothbrushes were only recommended for persons who have problems with strength or dexterity of their hands, but many dentists are now recommending them to many other patients in order to improve their home dental care. In many parts of the world natural toothbrushes are used. In the Muslim world the Miswak or siwak is made from twigs or roots that are alleged to have an antiseptic effect when applied as a toothbrush.

Fluoride-containing, or anti-plaque (tartar control) toothpastes or mouthwashes may be recommended by the dentist or dental hygienist.

Dentures, retainers, and other appliances must be kept extremely clean. This includes regular brushing and may include soaking them in a cleansing solution.

Professional care

Dental hygienist polishing a patient's teeth Regular tooth cleaning by the dentist or dental hygienist is important to remove plaque that may develop even with careful brushing and flossing, especially in areas that are difficult for a patient to reach on his own at home. Professional cleaning includes tooth scaling and tooth polishing and debridement if too much tartar has accumulated. This involves the use of various instruments or devices to loosen and remove deposits from the teeth.

Many dentists recommend having the teeth professionally cleaned every six months. More frequent cleaning and examination may be necessary during the treatment of many of the dental/oral disorders. Routine examination of the teeth is recommended at least

every year. This may include yearly, select dental X-rays. See also dental plaque identification procedure and removal.

However, in between cleanings by a dentist or dental hygienist, everyone must have good oral hygiene to support the professional care.

Outcome

Good oral hygiene prevents, and is vital to the treatment of, many of the dental and oral disorders. Good oral hygiene results in healthy teeth and mouth.

Complications

Usually there are no complications; however, overly vigorous or improperly performed brushing and flossing may result in injury to the gingiva (gums).

Call the dentist or dental hygienist if instructions or demonstration of proper brushing or flossing techniques is needed, or to schedule routine dental cleaning and examination.