

A beautiful sparkling smile starts with healthy teeth and gums. Follow these tips

Eat a healthy diet, limiting foods that are high in sugar. Soft, sticky foods such as candy and dried fruit cling to your teeth, promoting tooth decay. Substitute fresh fruit and vegetables instead. Eliminate high sugar soda pop from your diet. Sugar and acid in soft drinks, juices and sports drinks can set up the perfect environment for tooth decay. If you drink bottled water, drink fluoridated bottled water.

Don't smoke. The Academy of General Dentistry notes that there is no safe form of tobacco—using it produces many problems and risk factors, from tooth discoloration and gum disease to throat, lung, and oral cancer, and, ultimately, even death.

Brush at least twice a day. Brushing with a fluoridated toothpaste helps to remove plaque, the sticky film of bacteria that grows on your teeth and causes cavities, gum disease and tooth loss. Be sure to clean between your teeth once a day with dental floss. Flossing removes plaque between your teeth where your toothbrush can't reach and is critical in preventing periodontal (gum disease).

Visit your dentist on a regular basis for a professional cleaning and exam. Your dental visit will include an exam by your dentist checking for decay, periodontal disease, and oral cancer. Based on your dental health needs, your dentist may recommend a professional cleaning every three, four or six months. Be sure to tell your dentist about any changes in your health or medication.

Wear a mouthguard. If you are active in sports such as basketball, softball, football, wrestling, soccer, lacrosse, rugby, in-line skating and martial arts, a professional mouthguard made by your dentist should be part of your equipment. Mouthguards can help prevent serious injuries such as broken teeth and jaws, laceration and bruising of the lips and cheeks, and may reduce the severity and incidence of concussions.