

YEAR-ROUND TIPS FOR BETTER ORAL HEALTH

To many people, the start of a new year means the chance for a fresh start. They kick off January committed to resolutions for the New Year, which run the gamut from big (“I’m going to train for a marathon!”) to small (“I’m staying off social media on weekends!”). Unfortunately, implementing change can often be hard, and it’s estimated that 80% of people fail to keep their New Year’s resolutions. Since getting healthy is one of the most popular resolutions, it’s important to make a plan and set specific goals in order to achieve a healthier you. One aspect of getting healthy that can make everyone smile is better oral health. Regular brushing, flossing, and visits to the dentist will help you maintain a healthier mouth, as well as an overall healthier you.

Here are five oral health practices that will help deliver a healthier smile all year long:

- 1. Visit the dentist regularly.** Your teeth and gums hold important clues to other health issues. So, if you’re interested in maintaining good overall health as well as your smile, visit your dentist for a checkup and cleaning at least twice a year. An exam allows your dentist not only to help you maintain healthy teeth and gums, but also to be on the lookout for developments that may lead to future health problems, including oral cancer.
- 2. Floss every day.** In addition to brushing your teeth with fluoride toothpaste twice a day for two minutes, daily flossing will help remove the plaque that collects between teeth and reduce the likelihood of gum disease and tooth decay.
- 3. Reduce your sugar consumption.** Too many sweets don’t just wreak havoc on your waistline. Sugar is the “food” for harmful oral bacteria that create

acids that destroy tooth enamel and lead to cavities. To limit your sugar intake, avoid soft drinks, go easy on sugary juices, and limit carbs that break down into sugar. Instead, drink fluoridated water—which will help make your teeth more resistant to the acid attacks that can cause cavities—and eat dairy and lean proteins that will help strengthen your teeth. Chewing fruits and vegetables that are high in water and fiber also helps stimulate saliva production and wash away harmful acids and food particles.

- 4. Stop biting your nails, chewing your pen, or chomping on ice.** All of these habits increase the risk of chipping, cracking, or breaking your teeth. Nail biting can even lead to jaw dysfunction, since placing your jaw in a protruding position for long periods of time can place too much pressure on it.
- 5. Stop any smoking or tobacco use.** In addition to heart disease and lung cancer, smoking and tobacco products can cause a slew of oral health problems, including bad breath and stained teeth, dulled sense of taste and smell, gum disease, and oral cancer. E-cigarettes also can have a significant impact on your oral health. The nicotine these products contain reduces blood flow, restricting the supply of nutrients and oxygen to the soft tissues of the mouth. This can cause the gums to recede and exacerbate periodontal diseases. Reduced blood circulation also inhibits the mouth’s natural ability to fight against bacteria, which can accelerate infection, decay, and other health problems.

For more oral health tips that you can incorporate all year, visit massdental.org/oral-health.

