

Oral Hygiene and Overall Health for Alphas

We all know prevention is one of the keys to staying healthy. Oral hygiene is another important step in maintaining overall health. And, it's not just about having whiter teeth and a brighter smile!

People used to think that tooth loss was the worst result of gum disease. But studies have shown **oral health affects your entire body**. Bacteria in your mouth, especially from decaying teeth or infected gums, can easily enter your bloodstream. From there, they migrate through your body damaging your heart, lungs, and other organs.

Recent research also suggests the bacteria found in your mouth and throat can be drawn into the lower respiratory tract. Then, they cause infections in your lungs and bronchial tubes.

Some people are more likely to get respiratory infections:

- The very young or very old
- Alphas with lung disease
- People with weak immune systems

For these people, good oral hygiene is a key part of a disease management and prevention program.

Some medicines cause dry mouth

Some of the inhaled medications for COPD cause dry mouth. The most common of these are [short-acting muscarinic antagonists \(SAMA\)](#) and [long-acting muscarinic antagonists \(LAMA\)](#) inhalers. To prevent dry mouth, practice your inhaler technique, and rinse your mouth with water or mouthwash after using your inhaler.

What is gum disease?

Gum disease starts when a build-up of bacteria, called plaque, collects at the gum line. Over time, this hardens into calcium

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deposits called calculus or tartar. With poor oral care, these bacteria can cause swelling of the gums, or gingivitis. They may end up penetrating the gum line and spreading into the underlying bone.

The human mouth always contains some bacteria. But, any kind of dental infection increases the number of bacteria present. It can also lead to hard-to-treat infections in the lungs or airways.

According to some estimates, as many as three out of four adults over the age of 30 may suffer from some degree of gum disease. Fortunately, with proper oral care, gum disease can be controlled or even reversed.

Oral hygiene tips

Visiting your dental hygienist on a regular basis is one of the most important steps you can take to maintain or improve your oral health. Your dental hygienist will review your medical history, clean and polish your teeth, and refer any areas of concern to your dentist or physician.

Developing a good daily cleaning regime, along with routine office visits with a dental hygienist, will control or reverse gum disease. Less than five minutes, twice a day, is all it takes to maintain or improve oral hygiene:

Brushing:

1. Place your brush at a 45-degree angle at the place where your teeth and gum meet.
2. Apply gentle pressure as you move the brush away from the gums.
3. Don't forget to brush your tongue (with or without toothpaste), where bacteria build up.
4. Brush for about three minutes.

Flossing:

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1. Wrap 18 inches of floss around your middle fingers until you have a two-inch length between them.
2. With the thumb and forefinger of each hand, guide the floss gently and carefully between each tooth in a “C” shape.
3. Gently guide it up and under the gum line.

Mouthwash: There is no evidence that using antibacterial mouthwash prevents upper respiratory infections. But you will have better breath.

Dentures: Clean your mouth and get regular check-ups to prevent oral health problems.

Nothing puts a smile on your face like better health, so take care of your teeth and gums!

For more in-depth information on this topic, please visit the [Big Fat Reference Guide \(BFRG\)](#). If you are enrolled in AlphaNet's Subscriber Portal, you can access the BFRG [here](#).