

# Reducing your risk of oral diseases

Tooth decay, periodontal disease and oral cancer: What you should know



Although they're three very different diseases, tooth decay, periodontal disease and oral cancer have one important thing in common: there are things you can do to help reduce your risk of getting them.

## Tooth decay<sup>1</sup>

### What it is

Tooth decay is damage to a tooth's surface, or enamel. It can lead to cavities, which are holes in your teeth. If tooth decay isn't treated, it can cause sensitivity, pain and infections, and it can even cause you to lose your teeth.

### How you can help prevent it

- › Drink water with fluoride.
- › Brush with fluoride toothpaste twice a day.
- › Floss every day.
- › Avoid sugary foods.
- › Limit snacks between meals.
- › Visit your dentist regularly.

**Tooth decay is more common than you might think.**

90% of adults age 20+ have some degree of tooth decay.<sup>2</sup>

## Periodontal disease<sup>3</sup>

### What it is

Commonly known as gum disease, periodontal disease is caused by bacteria in plaque building up inside your mouth. If it continues to grow, this bacteria can cause your gums to swell, which can lead to gum recession, pain, loose teeth, bad breath or even tooth loss.

**Gum disease can affect more than just your oral health.**

Research has shown that it may also be associated with other diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease, as well as with poor pregnancy outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

## Oral cancer<sup>4</sup>

### What it is

Also called mouth cancer, oral cancer is cancer that occurs anywhere on the lips or inside your mouth or throat. Oral cancer forms when cells change or mutate in their DNA. It's not clear what causes these mutations to occur, but certain factors have been identified that increase your risk, such as tobacco use, heavy alcohol use, excessive sun exposure to your lips, human papillomavirus (HPV) and a weakened immune system.

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## How you can help prevent these oral diseases

- › Drink water with fluoride.
- › Brush your teeth twice a day for two minutes with fluoride toothpaste.
- › Floss and use mouthwash every day to remove any particles brushing might miss.
- › Avoid sugary foods.
- › Limit snacks between meals.
- › Visit your dentist.
- › Eat a balanced diet.
- › Don't use tobacco of any kind, and limit alcohol consumption.
- › Avoid excessive sun exposure to your lips.
- › Talk to your dentist and be honest so they can assess your risks based on your age and family history.
- › See a periodontist for gum disease, if recommended by your dentist.

**Oral cancer affects more men than women.**

Men are twice as likely to develop oral cancer.<sup>5</sup>



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2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2019). "Oral Health Surveillance Report: Trends in Dental Caries and Sealants, Tooth Retention, and Edentulism, United States, 1999–2004 to 2011–2016." CDC, US Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/OHSR-2019-index.html>
3. American Academy of Periodontology. "Gum Disease Information." <https://www.perio.org/for-patients/gum-disease-information/>
4. Prevent Cancer Foundation. "Oral cancer." <https://www.preventcancer.org/education/preventable-cancers/oral-cancer/>; Mayo Clinic. "Mouth cancer." <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mouth-cancer/symptoms-causes/syc-20350997>
5. Cancer Treatment Centers of America. (2021, October 1). "Risk factors for oral cancer." <https://www.cancercenter.com/cancer-types/oral-cancer/risk-factors>

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