

# Healthy Hints: October 2015

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## National Dental Hygiene Month

Today's older adults are keeping their teeth longer than ever before.

A healthy mouth and teeth help you look good, eat delicious and nutritious foods, as well as speak clearly and confidently.

### Healthy Habits for a Healthy Mouth

**Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste-**Your risk of cavities increases with age. One of the reasons is dry mouth—a common side effect of many prescription medications. Use a soft toothbrush with a small head to get to those hard to reach areas. Replace your tooth brush when it becomes frayed. Try an electric toothbrush if you have arthritis or other condition that limits movement.

**Floss your teeth daily-**It is important to clean between the teeth with pre-threaded flossers, tiny brushes that go between the teeth, water flossers or wooden plaque removers.

**Clean dentures daily-**Bacteria stick to your natural teeth and to your dentures too. If you wear dentures, remember to clean them with cleaners made specifically for dentures. Take your dentures out for at least 4 of every 24 hours to keep the lining of your mouth healthy.

**Visit a dentist regularly-**Get regular dental checkups at least once a year. As you age, the nerves inside your teeth become smaller and less sensitive. So please don't wait until you experience pain. By the time you feel pain from a cavity, it may be too late and you might lose your tooth. Your dentist will also look for more serious conditions, like oral cancer and gum disease. If you need to find a dentist, you can search for one at [ADA Find-A-Dentist](#). Enter your address for a list of ADA member dentists near your home.

**Drink water with fluoride-**No matter what your age is, drinking water with fluoride helps to prevent tooth decay. Many community water systems contain added fluoride, but if you prefer bottled water, check the label because some do not contain fluoride.

**Quit smoking-**Smoking increases problems with gum disease, tooth decay, and tooth loss. It also slows down the healing process after dental procedures and can reduce the success rate of dental implants. There are smoking cessation programs, over-the-counter products and prescription drugs that your dentist may recommend to help you quit for good. So, talk to your dentist about quitting, it's never too late!

# **The Top 9 Foods That Damage Your Teeth**

**What you eat matters**- Hard candies may seem harmless, but eat too many and the constant sugar can be harmful to your teeth. Hard candies also put your teeth at risk because they can trigger a dental emergency such as a broken or chipped tooth. A better choice? Try sugarless gum that carries the ADA seal.

**Ice is for chilling, not chewing**-Ice is made of water and doesn't contain sugar or other additives. But is not good for your teeth. Chewing on hard substances can create a dental emergency and damage enamel. Advice: Break the habit of chewing on ice and enjoy water in its liquid form.

**Watch your citrus intake**-Frequent exposure to acidic foods can erode enamel, making teeth more susceptible to decay over time. Citrus fruits and juices can also irritate mouth sores. Make sure to drink plenty of plain water.

**Watch your coffee and tea**-They can be healthy beverage choices in their natural form. But too many people can't resist adding sugar. Caffeinated coffee and tea can also dry out your mouth. Frequent drinks of coffee and tea may also stain your teeth. If you consume these beverages, drink plenty of water and limit the add-ons.

**Sticky foods are your mouths worst nightmare**-Sticky foods can damage your teeth since they tend to stay on your teeth longer than other types of food. If you find yourself eating sticky foods, make sure to rinse your mouth with water and to brush and floss carefully.

**Beware of things that go crunch**-Potato chips and other crunchy snacks contain starch, which tends to get trapped in your teeth. If you choose to eat snacks like these, take care when you floss that day to remove all the food particles that can lead to plaque build-up.

**Swap out soda with water**-When you eat sugary foods or sip sugary drinks for long periods of time, plaque bacteria use that sugar to produce acids that attack your enamel. Most carbonated soft drinks, including diet soda, are acidic and therefore, bad for your teeth. Try to drink a cup of water with your soft drinks.

**Limit alcohol consumption**-Alcohol causes dehydration and dry mouth. Excessive drinking can reduce saliva flow over time, which can lead to tooth decay and oral infections such as gum disease. It also increases your risk for mouth cancer.

**Watch out for sports drinks**-Sugar is a top ingredient for many sports and energy drinks. Check the label to make sure your drink of choice is low in sugar, or just drink water.