

# The connection between oral health and overall health



## Empowering Information to Improve Your Oral Health

Regular dental checkups may tell dentists about your overall health.

Although seeing a dentist is no substitute for a visit to a physician, regular dental checkups can reveal much about your overall health.

If a dentist finds a potential health issue, he or she can refer you to a physician for follow-up.

Did you know that more than 120 medical conditions, some of them life-threatening, can be detected in the early stages by your dentist?

It is well documented that a high percentage of health conditions can have oral symptoms such as swollen or bleeding gums, ulcers, dry mouth, bad breath, metallic taste and various other changes in the oral cavity.

Scientific American reports that current research indicates a relationship between oral and overall (systemic) health. "Systemic" refers to the involvement of many organs or systems of the whole body.

With this brochure, Delta Dental of Oklahoma wants to help you learn more about the connection between some of the more common health conditions and your oral health and what you can do to promote good oral health for you and your family.

*The Delta Dental of Oklahoma  
Oral Health Division*

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*Did you know?*

Nearly  
**60 million**  
people trust  
their smiles  
to  
Delta Dental.

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### Heart Disease. What can you do?

Studies have shown that people with moderate or advanced gum (periodontal) disease are more likely to have cardiovascular disease (CVD) or heart disease than those with healthy gums. Although gum disease seems to be associated with heart disease, more studies are needed. But we do know that regular dental checkups, professional cleanings and good oral hygiene practices can improve oral health and that good oral health contributes to good overall health. You can play a major role in preventing gum disease:

- Brush for two to three minutes, twice a day, with fluoridated toothpaste. Be sure to brush along the gumline.
- Floss daily to remove plaque from places your toothbrush can't reach.
- Eat a healthy diet to provide essential nutrients (vitamins A and C, in particular).
- Avoid cigarettes and smokeless tobacco.
- Carefully follow your physician's and dentist's instructions about health care, including using prescription medications, such as antibiotics, as directed.

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### Diabetes. Regular dentist visits help.

Studies show that people with diabetes are more susceptible to tooth loss and the development of gum (periodontal) disease and other oral health problems. Why? Diabetes can slow the healing process and lower resistance to infections, including oral infections. Maintenance of good oral health through regular dental visits and appropriate treatment of gum problems is critical for people with diabetes. What else can you do?

- Brush for two to three minutes, twice a day, with fluoridated toothpaste. Be sure to brush along the gumline.
- Floss daily to remove plaque from places your toothbrush can't reach.
- Eat a healthy diet to provide essential nutrients (vitamins A and C, in particular).
- Treat dental infections immediately.
- Make sure your dentist knows you have diabetes and share your complete medical history, including any medications you are currently taking.

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### Oral Cancer. Early detection is key.

Your dentist should screen for oral cancer and other cancers of the head and neck, including skin cancer, cancer of the jaw bone and thyroid cancer, during routine checkups. Survival rates greatly increase the earlier oral cancer is discovered and treated. During your next dental visit, ask your dentist to do an oral cancer screening. See your dentist immediately if you observe:

- any sore that persists longer than two weeks;
- a swelling, growth or lump anywhere in or around the mouth or neck;
- white or red patches in the mouth or on the lips;
- repeated bleeding from the mouth or throat; or
- difficulty swallowing or persistent hoarseness.

You can help prevent oral cancer by:

- Not smoking or using spit tobacco
- Limiting your alcohol intake
- Eating plenty of fruits and vegetables



Also, periodic self-examinations can increase your chances of detecting oral cancer, so be sure to examine your face, cheeks, jaw and neck regularly for any changes or lumps.

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### Tobacco Use?

While most people are aware of the impact tobacco use has on their overall health, some might not consider its effects on oral health, including:

- Increased risk of mouth pain, cavities and gum recession (which can lead to tooth loss)
- Reduced ability to fight infection, including in the mouth and gums
- Slower healing of gum tissue after oral surgery or from injury
- Increased risk of tooth loss (twice that of non-smokers)
- Increased risk of needing root canal treatment (twice that of non-smokers)
- Increased risk of gum (periodontal) disease (50 percent more cases than non-smokers)
- Reduced effectiveness of gum disease treatments
- Children exposed to tobacco smoke may have delayed formation of permanent teeth.

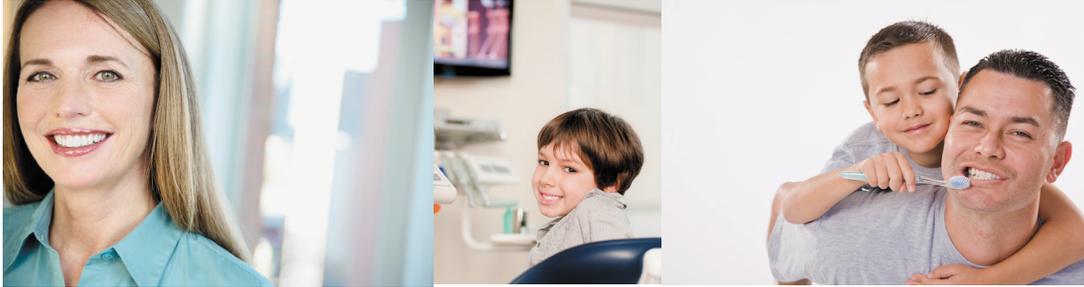


#### Oral Health Tips for Expectant Mothers:

- Brush your teeth twice daily with fluoride toothpaste. Floss daily.
- If you suffer from “morning sickness,” make sure to rinse your mouth out with water and baking soda solution afterward. The combination will neutralize acid that could lead to dental disease.
- Limit foods containing sugar to mealtime only.
- Choose water or low-fat milk as a beverage and avoid carbonated drinks.
- Choose fruit rather than fruit juice to meet the recommended daily fruit intake.

We're on a mission to improve oral health.

As the nation's largest dental benefits carrier, Delta Dental supports programs that focus on preventing dental disease, expanding access to care, advancing dental science and helping our members understand the connections between oral wellness and overall health.



We encourage you to take control of your oral health.

Visiting a dentist regularly can help you maintain your oral health. A dentist's exam may detect poor nutrition and hygiene and oral cancer, as well as provide clues to your overall health and well-being. Also, floss then brush every day.

It is important for you and your family to provide your dentist with complete medical and dental histories and to inform your dentist of any recent health developments, including the use of over-the-counter medications and diet supplements, even if they seem unrelated to oral health. Why? Because some health conditions can even affect how dental care is provided.

While this brochure provides general information on more common oral health issues, we invite you to learn more. Educate yourself further about the relationships between oral and overall health by visiting our dedicated oral wellness website at [www.Preventefits.org](http://www.Preventefits.org) and the oral health section of our company website [www.DeltaDentalOK.org](http://www.DeltaDentalOK.org).



Delta Dental of Oklahoma  
16 Northwest 63rd Street  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73116  
405-607-2100 (OKC Metro)  
800-522-0188 (Toll Free)