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This booklet is provided for free by Delta Dental of Idaho's Community Outreach Program. As a non-profit organization, Delta Dental is more than a dental benefits company. We share in a promise to advance solutions for great oral health, for all Idahoans.

Our Mission:

Delta Dental of Idaho is the market leader providing the best value in dental benefit solutions. We are a not-for-profit organization making a difference by increasing access to better oral health care through innovation and exceptional service.

Ageless Smiles

Your Guide To Dental Health



Delta Dental Community Outreach

GOING BEYOND BENEFITS

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The Mouth/Body Connection

There's a two-way street between diseases in your mouth and diseases in your body. Ninety percent of the body's health conditions, such as diabetes, vitamin imbalances, and auto-immune diseases, show signs and symptoms in the mouth. A dentist can tell a lot about your overall health by how your mouth looks. Likewise, diseases in the mouth, mostly gum diseases, may be possible risk factors for pneumonia, heart disease, stroke, and uncontrolled diabetes.

Taking care of your teeth and gums is as much about your overall health as your dental health.

The following *Keys to Dental Health* provide practical ideas for taking care of your mouth throughout your life.

Keys to Dental Health

- Twice Daily Brushing
- Daily Flossing
- Good Nutrition
- Regular Self Oral Exams
- Regular Dental Visits

Regular Dental Visits

Just as your personal dental care routine is important to your overall health, so is a regular dental check-up and cleaning with your dentist.

Regular dental cleanings can keep gum disease to a minimum. This can help in managing other, more serious, health conditions like heart disease, pneumonia, and diabetes.

A dentist that knows your mouth can watch for changes and address needs early. Many times, catching a problem early will keep you out of pain and be less expensive.

A dentist can prescribe aids like prescription strength toothpaste and mouth rinses to help you maintain your dental health. Following these prescriptions can help prevent the need for restorative treatment.

Preventing disease, together with your dentist, is key to maintaining a quality of life as you age.



If you would like information about dentists in your area, including dentists that accept Medicaid, call the Idaho Care Line, toll-free by dialing 211.

Regular Self Oral Exams

- Feel your cheeks and lips, inside and out, with clean fingers. Stick out your tongue and look at all sides of the tongue and underneath the tongue. Check the roof of your mouth.
- Examine your teeth and gums. Push on your gums and look for any signs of bleeding and/or pus. Push on your teeth to see if they are loose.

See a Dentist Soon If You Notice:

- Changes in the color of your gums, lips, inside cheeks, roof of the mouth, and tongue. These may indicate conditions such as a vitamin deficiency, yeast infection, or oral cancer.
- Growths or swellings anywhere in your mouth. A growth under your tongue, in cheeks or lips, needs to be checked immediately.
- Bleeding gums if you are regularly brushing and flossing.
- Pus coming from the gums or around the teeth is a sign of infection, which weakens the body and should be dealt with immediately.
- Changes in the color of a single tooth.
- Black, brown, or green staining of teeth along the gum line.
- A loose tooth.

Twice Daily Brushing

Everyone has unique needs and preferences for their dental care. Brushing a minimum of twice a day, morning and night, is a basic requirement for dental health. If you have a dry mouth, brushing three times a day is recommended.

Choosing The Right Toothbrush For You:

- If gripping the small handle of a toothbrush is difficult, you can adapt a regular toothbrush by sliding a bicycle grip onto the handle, wrapping the handle with bubble wrap and tape, or cutting a small slit in a tennis ball and sliding the handle into it.



**An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
The most effective measure to reduce the
incidence of disease is basic prevention.**

Twice Daily Brushing

Choosing The Right Toothbrush For You:

- If you have lost some fine motor skills, try a toothbrush with a bigger bristle head, it covers more ground with less work. You also might want to try a mechanical toothbrush that rotates for you.
- If your mouth is small and you have trouble reaching to the back of your mouth, try a child-size toothbrush.
- Always use soft bristle brushes. Harder bristles can damage your gums and teeth over time.
- Replace your toothbrush every 3 months, after a contagious illness, or when the bristles are worn.



Choosing The Right Toothpaste:

- Fluoride is as important for adults as it is for kids. Fluoride bonds to teeth and strengthens against cavities.
- If your gums have receded, you are more susceptible to cavities due to the root surfaces of the tooth being exposed. You may benefit from using a prescription strength fluoride toothpaste, which can significantly reduce your chances of cavities. Ask your dentist or physician.

Good Nutrition

It's Not Just What You Eat, But How Often:

When you want a sweet treat, it is best to eat it with a meal, when the body is producing more saliva. Saliva helps wash away food and neutralize acids before they attack your teeth.

If you have persistent dry mouth you are more prone to acid attacks because you lack the saliva necessary to wash away food and keep the mouth neutralized. Drinking water with meals and rinsing vigorously after eating can help clean and neutralize your mouth. If you can, brush after each meal or snack.

To combat dry mouth, drink a lot of water, at least 8 glasses a day, and avoid alcoholic, caffeinated, and sugary beverages. Also avoid mouth rinses that contain alcohol. Chew sugarless gum or mints to stimulate saliva flow. Talk to your dentist or physician about saliva aids.

Regular Self Oral Exams

Every couple weeks, look for changes in your teeth and gums. This can alert you to when treatment may be needed. When examining your mouth:

- Make sure to use good lighting. If you need, use a flashlight.
- Look after brushing and flossing. Remove all partials and denture.

Good Nutrition

Eating a Nutrient-Rich Diet is Essential to a Healthy Mouth:

Vitamin B complex is known to keep the skin and nervous system healthy, as well as the mouth. Deficiencies in Vitamin B complex often show up as sores in the mouth and on the lips. Whole grains, bran, brown rice, turkey, avocados, and nuts are high in Vitamin B6. Fish, beef, eggs, and most dairy products are good sources of Vitamin B12.

Although a balanced diet is the best way to give your body what it needs, sometimes supplementing with vitamins can help. Supplementation should be discussed with your physician.

It's Not Just What You Eat, But How Often:

Each time you eat or drink anything other than water, it interacts with the bacteria in the mouth, bathing your teeth in acid for 20 minutes or more. Sugary or carbohydrate-rich foods such as cookies, cakes, licorice, raisins, prunes, crackers, chips, and pretzels stick to the teeth and can cause cavities.



Instead, choose snacks like cheese, crisp apples, grapes, pears, cut up vegetables, or nuts. A good way to check if a food is healthy for your teeth is to make sure the food is not stuck in and around your teeth 20 minutes after you have finished eating. If your health requires you to snack often, get into the habit of vigorously rinsing with water after each snack.

Twice Daily Brushing

How to Brush Your Teeth:

- Brush for two minutes at a time, using a fluoride toothpaste.
- Make sure to brush the insides, outsides and tops of your teeth. Use small circular brush strokes and angle the bristles to clean where your gums and teeth meet.
- When using a mechanical brush, hold the bristles angled into the gums. Let the brush head move on its own, doing the work for you.
- Remove partial dentures before you brush your remaining teeth.
- Brush your gums and tongue gently; plaque and food collect on the gums and tongue as well as the teeth.
- Rinse vigorously after you brush to help remove any remaining debris from your mouth.



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Brushing Your Dentures:

- Use a denture brush to brush your partials and dentures. Brush your partials and dentures as often as you would your teeth. It is recommended you remove dentures or partials at night to help prevent infections and the overgrowth of yeast.

Good oral hygiene and regular dental check-ups are important throughout your life, whatever your age.

Daily Flossing

When caring for your teeth, it is important to clean the areas between your teeth and under your gums.

How To Floss:

- Wrap floss around your middle fingers. Use your index finger and thumb to manipulate the floss between the teeth. Make sure to slide the floss against the sides of each tooth and go under the gums slightly to scoop up plaque from under the gums.



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Daily Flossing

How To Floss:

- If flossing is difficult due to lost dexterity or fine motor abilities, try a floss holder.
- Floss can shred and break if teeth are tight or fillings are rough. Try using a silk or satin floss. If you are flossing, but still find or feel food between some of your teeth, you may need to use a toothpick, a tapered dental brush, or a “go-between” to fully clean these areas.



Good Nutrition

Eating a Nutrient-Rich Diet is Essential to a Healthy Mouth:

Vitamin D and calcium are especially important in helping to prevent tooth loss as well as reducing the effects of osteoporosis. Vitamin D is found in fortified milk and cereals, as well as fatty fish like salmon, mackerel and tuna. Calcium is found in dairy products and also in dark green, leafy vegetables, beans, almonds and sesame seeds.

Vitamin C can help protect against bacterial infections in the gums. Most fruits, citric juices, and many vegetables contain vitamin C.