Guardian

Top Tips for Healthy Teeth and Gums

Floss First or Brush First?

Flossing first helps make brushing your teeth more effective by removing food that gets trapped between teeth. If handling floss flusters you, look for floss holders at the drugstore. When it's time to brush, be sure to angle bristles 45-degree at the gum line, then brush gently, moving the brush in a gentle circular motion.

Go Easy With Toothpicks

If you have neither floss nor a soft pick, you can use a tooth pick, but be very, very gentle. It's easy to press too hard and damage your gums, or even worse, break off a toothpick below the gum line. Floss helps remove food from between teeth better than a toothpick and fights plaque buildup by getting rid of bacteria that form there. Regularly using a toothpick to remove food trapped in a single area may indicate a bigger problem that requires a dentist's attention.

Replace Your Toothbrush

Toothbrush bristles fray, flatten, and wear over time. To help keep your smile bright, replace your manual toothbrush every three or four months; for electric toothbrush heads, follow the manufacturer's advice. Feeling sick? Avoid harboring germs by replacing your toothbrush at the beginning and end of your illness.

Say Cheese for White Teeth!

The casein and whey protein in cheese can help keep your tooth enamel in top form by reducing demineralization. A bonus: Cheese also has vital, tooth-building calcium. Don't forget to include vitamin D in your diet, which helps your body absorb calcium. A few vitamin D-rich foods include milk, egg yolks, and fish.

Stop Stains With Baking Soda

If your love of coffee, red wine, or other tooth-staining food and drink is leaving your pearly whites dim, try brushing baking soda on your teeth twice a month, just like you would toothpaste, then rinse away to help brighten your smile. If plain baking soda irritates your teeth or gums, you may want to try a toothpaste that contains baking soda or avoid it completely.

Foods Can Stain or Brighten Teeth

There's speculation that strawberries may have natural teeth-whitening properties. But it's best to brush thoroughly after eating teeth-staining food like blueberries, coffee, and cigarettes. To help minimize discoloration, brush, then munch on apples, pears, carrots, or celery, all of which trigger tooth-bathing saliva, which helps keep your teeth bright.

Regulate Your Acid Reflux

If you have acid reflux, you'll want to get it under control to help preserve tooth enamel and oral health. Common foods and drinks that trigger reflux include chocolate; alcohol; caffeinated drinks like soda, coffee, and tea; garlic and onions; dairy; tomatoes; citrus fruits; mint; and spicy, fatty, or fried foods.

Take Care of Your Tongue

Tackle bad breath every time you brush -- take time to brush or scrape your tongue, too. Your tongue plays host to the bacteria that help cause bad breath, so giving it a scrub, or using a tongue scraper daily, can help reduce odor-causing compound

Medication Can Cause Dry Mouth

Your mouth needs saliva to stay healthy, but hundreds of medications, like antidepressants, high blood pressure drugs, and antihistamines, can dry up saliva. Medication is the most common cause of dry mouth. To help keep your mouth moist, increase your fluid intake, ask your dentist about an artificial saliva product, or chew sugarless gum after a meal.