

# Oral Health Connected to Overall Wellbeing

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts wants to help your employees stay healthy. Informing them that keeping their mouths clean helps keep other parts of the body healthy is an important part of the process.

## The Basics of Oral Health

### Tooth Decay and Diseases of the Mouth

Neglecting to care for your teeth has big consequences.

If not prevented, plaque from food particles forms on your teeth. The plaque produces bacteria that make the mouth more acidic. This acid breaks down tooth enamel, and leads to cavities and eventual tooth loss.<sup>1</sup>

Also, when enough plaque builds up over time on your teeth, it hardens into calcified tartar, which can only be removed by a dentist.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, poor oral health can cause gum disease. Gum disease causes bleeding and swelling of the gums. Eventually, bacteria and enzymes break down the bones and tissues that support your teeth.<sup>3</sup> This leads to tooth loss as well.<sup>4</sup>

## Oral Health's Effect on the Body Overall

Neglecting your oral health causes problems in other organs of the body.

Heart disease (coronary artery disease) results when lumps of plaque (non-dental) build up in the arteries. Researchers have linked increased bacteria in oral plaque to the increase of the same bacteria in the arteries leading to the heart.<sup>5</sup>

Diabetes is another disease linked to oral health. Those having difficulty controlling their blood sugar develop gum disease more severely and more often than those whose diabetes is under control. Improving oral health can also improve the management of diabetes.<sup>6</sup>

Even the health of a baby during pregnancy and birth can be affected by poor oral care. Researchers have found that pregnant women with gum disease are more likely to have their babies prematurely.<sup>7</sup>

1, 2. "Plaque," American Dental Association, <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/p/plaque>

3, 4. "Preventing Periodontal Disease," American Academy of Periodontology, <http://www.perio.org/consumer/prevent-gum-disease>

5. "Periodontal Disease and Systemic Health," American Academy of Periodontology, <http://www.perio.org/consumer/other-diseases>

6. "Diabetes and Periodontal Disease," American Academy of Periodontology, <http://www.perio.org/consumer/diabetes.htm>

7. Jeffcoat MK, Hauth JC, Geurs NC, Reddy MS, Cliver SP, Hodgkins PM, Goldenberg RL, "Periodontal Disease and Preterm Birth, Results of a Pilot Interventional Study," J Periodontol. 2003 Aug; 74(8): 1214-1218.

# Improving Oral Health and Preventing Tooth Decay

There are several options to keeping your teeth and gums healthy:

- + Eat a well-balanced diet
- + Brush teeth twice a day with a soft brush and fluoride toothpaste
- + Floss at least once a day
- + Avoid smoking
- + See a dentist on a regular basis

With knowledge and the right tools, your employees can have both a clean mouth and a clean bill of health.



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