BRUSH UP
A quarterly brush up on your HumanaDental benefits

spring 2005

Dental Rx for overall health

Make brushing, flossing and dental checkups part of your efforts to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Oral health is more than a nice smile

Your teeth and gums say a mouthful about the condition of your body. Research shows infections can cause or aggravate problems elsewhere:

- The connection continues to grow between periodontal disease—infection of the gums—and heart disease and stroke. Bad teeth and gums contribute to high cholesterol, which is linked to these and other illnesses.
- Diabetics are more likely to develop oral infections and periodontal disease. The reverse also seems to be true.
- The lower respiratory tract can draw in bacteria from the mouth and throat, causing infections and worsening lung problems.
- Oral cancer, if caught early, can be treated. If it is not, cancer may spread to the rest of the body.

Dentists also may be the first to spot indications of osteoporosis, leukemia, eating disorders, kidney problems, acid reflux disease, premature births and low birth weights, and vitamin deficiencies.

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For braces, more TLC

Keeping your teeth clean when you have braces is likely to take a little extra time and effort. But visions of how great your teeth will soon look may be enough to keep you motivated day after day.

To minimize food debris and plaque, follow your orthodontist's advice on how and how often you need to brush and floss. He or she may recommend a fluoride mouthwash for hard-to-reach spots.

The American Association of Orthodontists advises patients with braces to avoid eating sticky, chewy and hard foods, as well as chewing on pens and other hard objects that can damage braces.

Low-tech vs. high-tech brushing

Is more power better when it comes to taking care of your teeth? Not necessarily.

Electric toothbrushes that rotate one way, then the other, are better at reducing plaque and gingivitis than manual brushes, an article in *The Journal of the American Dental Association* (ADA) concluded.

But, the ADA says manual toothbrushes can be just as effective as automated toothbrushes:

- Brush at least twice a day for two to three minutes.
- Brush at a 45-degree angle.

Power brushes do cover more teeth faster, and may be especially useful for people with limited dexterity. They also may make brushing more fun.

"The only thing that matters is that you brush your teeth," the Academy of General Dentistry says.

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