



# Take Care of Your Teeth

**CHALLENGE**  
Brush your teeth morning and evening and floss daily.

## Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read "Take Care of Your Teeth."
2. To complete the Challenge, brush your teeth at least twice a day and floss daily.
3. Keep a record of your completed Challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

New Zealand resident Natasha Harris drank an estimated two gallons of a popular soft drink loaded with sugar and caffeine every day. And it took a toll on her health and her teeth. She suffered from high blood pressure and an irregular heartbeat. She had an enlarged liver. When she tried to give up the habit, she was plagued by tremors, mood swings and other withdrawal symptoms. And eventually all her teeth were removed because of decay.

There's no way to sugar-coat the issue. If you consume a lot of sugary foods and drinks, your oral health will suffer. And it doesn't take gulping down two gallons of soft drinks a day. Doctors and dentists agree that soft drinks, energy drinks, sugar-sweetened snacks and poor oral hygiene habits can lead to irreversible damage to teeth. But it's not all bad news. Tooth decay is almost entirely preventable. Take Care of Your Teeth this month by brushing morning and evening and flossing daily.

## If Your Teeth Could Talk

If your teeth could talk, they might ask you to brush after gulping down a sugary soft drink or floss after eating corn on the cob. Your chompers would probably demand that you do a better job at brushing and flossing daily. Here's why:

- In the United States, about 1 in 4 adults have untreated tooth decay and advanced gum disease, According to the American Dental Association.
- Employed adults lose over 164 million hours of work a year due to poor oral health and dental visits.
- Among school-age children, tooth decay is the most common chronic illness.
- And one in four adults over age 65 has lost all their teeth caused by a lifetime of poor oral hygiene.



## What Are You Putting in Your Mouth?

Desserts, soft drinks, and junk foods are big contributors to cavities. Sugars and starches in these foods provide fuel for bacteria that creates plaque. Without brushing, plaque produces acid that eats away tooth enamel. Over time, plaque build-up can lead to cavities, tooth loss and gum disease. And it can be a lot more serious than an afternoon in the dentist's chair. Advanced gum disease has been linked to heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.

What you eat and drink can affect your oral health. In a study by the Academy of General Dentistry, researchers found that drinking soft drinks and energy drinks a few times a day can cause irreversible damage to tooth enamel after just five days. And new research published in the Journal of General Dentistry shows that being overweight can increase your risk for gum disease.

### Take the Oral Health Quiz

How much do you know about taking care of your teeth? Take this quiz to find out.

1. How many times a day should you brush your teeth?  
 a. Once  b. Twice  c. After every meal
2. How often should you floss?  
 a. Daily  b. Weekly  c. Monthly
3. How often should you visit the dentist?  
 a. Every month  b. Every six months  c. Every year
4. How often should you replace your toothbrush?  
 a. Every week  b. Every month  c. Every 3 months
5. Brushing and flossing your teeth can prevent:  
 a. Cavities  b. Gum disease  c. Both

Answers: 1. b; 2. a; 3. b; 4. c; 5. c.

Most people brush their teeth. But only one in 10 people brush correctly. And only about 12 percent of people floss daily. Research shows that good oral hygiene helps prevent tooth decay and gum disease. Taking care of your teeth and gums can also help reduce your risk for heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and other health conditions.

Source: American Dental Association

If your diet includes a lot of high-calorie and sugary foods, and your oral hygiene habits aren't ideal, you're at greater risk for cavities, gum disease, and costly dental care.



## Get With the Program

Dentists and oral hygienists have been preaching the same mantra for decades. "Brush your teeth at least twice a day, and floss daily." If you're not doing that already, it's time to get with the program. It only takes a few minutes a day to brush and floss, and the benefits last a lifetime. Here's how to take care of your teeth:

### 1. Choose the right toothbrush.

Use a soft-bristled toothbrush (manual or battery-powered) that fits your mouth and allows you to access all the surfaces of your teeth. Make sure the handle is long enough to hold in your hand comfortably. Toothbrushes with medium and hard bristles are available, but if you brush too vigorously, you could actually damage your gums, root surface, and tooth enamel. Try holding your brush with just 3 fingers to guard against over-brushing. Replace your toothbrush about every three months or after any illness.

### 2. Use toothpaste with fluoride.

Using toothpaste with fluoride strengthens the enamel of your teeth and helps remove plaque that can lead to cavities. Each time you brush, your teeth absorb some fluoride. Ask your dentist about fluoride supplements,

See the proper way to brush your teeth

<http://tinyurl.com/2fnggpv>

mouthwash and treatments to further strengthen tooth enamel.

### 3. Brush at least twice a day.

This practice removes bacteria and prevents plaque build-up that can cause tooth decay, gum disease, and other problems. When you brush your teeth:

- ✓ Use a clock or stopwatch to brush for at least two minutes.
- ✓ Hold the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle from your gum line.
- ✓ Brush in circles, and use short back-and-forth strokes.
- ✓ Gently brush all the surfaces of your teeth, gumline, and hard-to-reach areas.
- ✓ Brush your tongue to remove bacteria and freshen your breath.
- ✓ Rinse your toothbrush thoroughly until all leftover toothpaste and any food particles are gone. Store upright to dry.



### 4. Floss daily.

If you neglect to floss, plaque build-up between your teeth hardens and becomes tartar. Tartar is the leading cause of gum disease. And it can only be removed by your dentist. When you floss:

- ✓ Use a piece of dental floss about 18 inches long.
- ✓ Hold about 2 inches of the floss with each index finger.
- ✓ Glide the floss gently between your teeth.
- ✓ Be careful not to cut or damage the soft gums with the floss.

If you haven't been in the habit of flossing regularly, it is not uncommon for gums to bleed a little when you start flossing.

- ✓ Floss the sides of each tooth and slightly below the gum line.

- ✓ Floss every day to remove plaque and any food between your teeth.
- ✓ Or instead of floss, try using dental hygiene cleaning picks.

### 5. Eat healthy foods.

For Harris, drinking large quantities of soda a day destroyed her teeth. Sugary foods, sugar-sweetened drinks, and foods made from refined grains increase bacteria and plaque in your mouth. Limit these foods and eat more fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, and whole grains. And drink plenty of water.

See how to floss your teeth  
<http://tinyurl.com/cvhvney>

Best foods for healthy teeth  
<http://tinyurl.com/d4gawft>

### 6. Avoid alcohol and tobacco.

Tobacco use in any form increases your risk of gum disease, oral cancer, and infections. Similar risks are associated with drinking too much alcohol. And if you use both, the risks for oral cancer greatly increase.

### 7. See your dentist at least twice a year.

Regular check-ups and cleanings by a dentist or oral hygienist are an important part of protecting your teeth and oral health.

## Keep on Smiling

Preventive care is the best way to keep your teeth and gums healthy. And it only takes a few minutes a day to brush and floss. Take care of your teeth, and keep on smiling.

*Sources: Academy of General Dentistry, American Dental Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Journal of Clinical Dentistry, Journal of General Dentistry, National Health Information Center, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health.*





# Take Care of Your Teeth

**CHALLENGE**  
 Brush your teeth morning and evening and floss daily.

**Instructions**

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record the number of days you brush and floss your teeth.
3. Use the calendar to record the actions and choices you make to help brushing and flossing become part of your regular daily routine.
4. At the end of the month, total the number of days you brushed twice a day and flossed daily. You must do this on at least 22 days this month to complete the challenge. Then keep up this practice for a lifetime of best health.

MONTH:							HC = Health Challenge™ ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary
HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	
HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	
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\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I brushed my teeth morning and evening and flossed

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I did aerobic exercise

**Other wellness projects completed this month:**

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_