

RISK FACTORS FOR ORAL DISEASES

WHAT ARE THE MAIN RISK FACTORS?

There are four main risk factors for oral diseases:

1. A diet high in free sugars
2. Poor oral hygiene
3. Tobacco use
4. Harmful alcohol consumption

These behaviours also increase the risk of heart and respiratory diseases, cancer and diabetes.

Did you know?

Oral diseases and other chronic diseases share many of the same behavioural risk factors. The good news is that both oral health and general health can be protected by understanding these risks and taking action to prevent or reduce your risk of disease.

WAYS TO REDUCE YOUR RISK OF ORAL DISEASE



1. EAT A BALANCED, LOW-SUGAR DIET

Free sugars are the type of sugar most closely linked to **tooth decay**. They are added to foods and drinks (e.g. confectionery, cakes, sweetened cereals, soft drinks, energy drinks and sports drinks) or occur naturally in honey, syrups, fruit juices and fruit juice concentrates. They do not include the sugars naturally found in whole fruits, vegetables and milk.

CONSUMING TOO MANY FREE SUGARS CAN:

- ➡ Cause tooth decay
- ➡ Contribute to obesity
- ➡ Increase the risk of diabetes and other chronic disease

TIPS FOR HEALTHY EATING AND DRINKING

Sugar intake: keep your intake of free sugars to less than 10% of your daily energy intake, and ideally below 5% (around 6 teaspoons for adults and 3 teaspoons for children).

Food labels: check food labels for added sugars and be mindful of how much sugar you add when preparing food and drinks.

Acidic foods and drinks: limit your intake of these, such as citrus fruits, soft drinks and juices. If you do consume them, have them at mealtimes.

Snacking habits: avoid sugary snacks between meals. Choose healthier snacks, such as nuts, cheese and fresh fruit, rather than sugary or highly processed options.

Sugar-sweetened beverages: limit sugary drinks, including soft drinks, energy drinks and sports drinks. Whenever possible, choose water or milk instead.

Hydration: stay well hydrated, as water helps neutralize acids, wash away food particles and support saliva production, helping to protect your oral health.



World Oral Health Day
20 March



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2

PRACTICE GOOD ORAL HYGIENE

- ➔ Brush your teeth for 2 minutes, 2x a day with fluoride toothpaste to help prevent tooth decay.
- ➔ Clean between your teeth every day using floss or interdental brushes to remove plaque from areas your toothbrush cannot reach.
- ➔ Get regular dental check-ups. Combined with a good daily oral hygiene routine, they are key to preventing oral diseases.



3

AVOID TOBACCO

Tobacco is one of the world's greatest public health challenges and the leading cause of preventable death. **No form of tobacco is safe**, whether smoked or smokeless. This includes cigarettes, cigars, waterpipes, smokeless tobacco and other tobacco products, as well as betel-quid and areca-nut chewing.

TOBACCO USE:

- ➔ Increases the risk of gum disease and oral cancer
- ➔ Can stain teeth, cause bad breath and result in loss of taste and smell
- ➔ Can lead to premature tooth loss

4

LIMIT ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Harmful alcohol use is strongly linked to an increased risk of several cancers, including cancers of the mouth, larynx, pharynx and oesophagus. In addition, the acid and high sugar content of many alcoholic drinks can erode tooth enamel and increase the risk of tooth decay.



WHERE TO GO NEXT

Oral health is important at every age. There are a series of fact sheets available to support you and your family at every life stage: infants, children, adults and older adults.

AVOID INJURIES TO YOUR MOUTH

As well as reducing your risk of oral diseases, protect your mouth from injury. **Wear protective equipment**, such as a well-fitting mouthguard, when taking part in combat or contact sports and when cycling.



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