

# Common Oral Health Problems

## Preventing gum disease

According to the American Academy of Periodontology (AAP), up to 30 percent of people are generally susceptible to gum disease.

Maintaining good oral hygiene is the best thing you can do to stave off gingivitis, or keep it from developing into periodontitis, says Susan Karabin, DDS, president of the AAP. To prevent gum disease, floss once a day and brush twice a day using toothpaste and a soft-bristled toothbrush. Toothbrush options include manual toothbrushes, and for extra brushing strength, power brushes. You can also rinse daily with an antiseptic mouthwash.

In addition, Dr. Harms recommends getting a professional cleaning from your dentist twice a year, quitting smoking, and eating a healthy, balanced diet. "Smokers and people with diabetes both have a much higher rate of gum disease," says Harms. "If you smoke or have been diagnosed with diabetes, bring it up with your dentist. You may need to be screened for gingivitis more frequently."

## Keeping cavities at bay

"Tooth decay is the second most prevalent disease after the common cold," says Ohio-based dentist Matthew Messina, DDS, a spokesperson for the ADA. In addition to keeping your mouth clean with regular brushing and flossing, ask your dentist about sealants or fluoride treatments. "If you're prone to cavities, these measures can help prevent more decay from occurring," says Dr. Messina. In addition, you should reduce your consumption of sugar, especially carbonated sodas, which also contain enamel-harming acid.

Besides reducing your risk for gum disease, quitting smoking can help you avoid cavities as well. "The tar from cigarettes makes the surface of the teeth sticky, which allows bacteria to cling to your enamel," says Messina. "And the heat from smoking also dries out your mouth, which means there's less saliva to wash away bacteria."

## Avoiding TMJ

"More than 15 percent of adults suffer from some chronic facial pain, such as jaw tenderness, jaw popping, headaches, and neck aches,"

says Harms. Grinding or clenching the jaw is the most common cause, although TMJ can also occur because of arthritis of the jaw joint or trauma to the head, such as the blow from an airbag during a car accident. Grinding can also increase your risk for other dental problems, such as gum disease, tooth erosion, and cracked teeth.

If you suspect that you're grinding or clenching your teeth, talk to your dentist. She may prescribe a custom mouth guard, or splint, to reduce the pressure on your teeth and jaw. Stress-reducing techniques such as meditation can also help you cut down on the grinding that leads to TMJ. "Try applying a warm, wet washcloth to the jaw to relax the muscles," says Harms.