

April 2022

Oral Wellness Newsletter

Hello everyone! Here's our April newsletter. The content is easy to share - just use the "forward this email" button. Or highlight the text you want, then copy and paste it wherever you like. It's that simple.



♥ your dental hygienist

Every year, National Dental Hygienists Week falls on the second week of April. It's a time to show your favorite dental hygienist extra love to celebrate the important role they play at the dentist's office. You can even [send a card](#) to say thanks for all you do!

Just like nurses help doctors, dental hygienists work alongside dentists, helping to care for patients. They've earned specialized degrees and are licensed and registered in the states in which they work.

Dental hygienists are oral health professionals trained to do more than just polish your pearly whites. In many states, they also...

- Screen for signs of cavities, gum disease and oral cancer
- Assist the dentist in numbing the tooth or mouth
- Take X-rays and impressions of teeth for oral appliances, dentures and crowns
- Educate on oral hygiene, cavity prevention, smoking cessation and proper nutrition
- Perform non-surgical treatments for gum disease such as scaling and root planing
- Apply fluoride and sealants

So, take advantage of your dental hygienist's knowledge. Feel free to ask questions or talk about any concerns you have at your next appointment. As a conversation starter, take along the results from our online dental health assessment. Just answer a few simple questions to get a summary of your oral health status and possible risk factors, then print a copy for your dental hygienist and dentist to review.

[Take My Dental Assessment](#)



Providing oral care to people with autism

For a person with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a complex developmental disability that impairs communication and social, behavioral, and intellectual functioning, life often presents challenges. Receiving the proper professional oral care is sometimes among them, as obsessive routines, repetitive behaviors, unpredictable body movements, and self-injurious behavior may all be symptoms that can complicate dental care. But with a few adaptations, most people with mild or moderate ASD can be treated successfully in the general dental practice setting.

Common problems with oral care

The most common challenges in providing oral care to people with autism are communication and behavioral issues. If you are a caregiver for or are assisting someone with ASD, a few things to consider before going to the dentist are:

- The caregiver or dentist must align the level of communication with the patient's intellectual and functional abilities. Explaining and demonstrating any procedures can encourage cooperation.
- The invasive nature of oral care may trigger behavior problems, such as hyperactivity and frustration, so allowing the patient to become familiar with the office, staff, and equipment can help minimize this reaction.
- People with autism sometimes have unusual responses to stimuli, like sound and touch. Keeping the same appointment time and staff can help with consistency. Minimizing distractions to create a calm environment and allowing time for the person to adjust to the setting also can be helpful.

People with autism also sometimes have difficulty performing oral care at home. If the person has difficulty brushing and flossing on his or her own, a modified toothbrush or floss holder may make oral hygiene easier. Caregivers and dental professionals also should look out for

damaging oral habits, such as teeth grinding, tongue thrusting, chewing non-food objects, or self-injurious behavior like biting the lip. In some cases, a mouthguard may be needed.

Find the right dentist

Finding the right dentist also can go a long way in achieving a successful dental visit for those with autism. Dentists experienced in treating people with developmental disabilities are trained and accustomed to handling the types of issues described. It's important to call and speak with the office prior to the appointment to make the staff aware of the patient's condition and specific challenges. Children with ASD may experience different problems than adults with ASD, so that's also important to consider. [Find a dentist](#) with United Concordia's dental provider search.

Check out this [booklet from the National Institutes of Health](#) for additional guidance on how to help people with autism achieve optimum oral health care to keep their mouth healthy for a lifetime.

Sources:

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health. Practical Oral Care for People With Autism, July 2009, NIH Publication No. 09-5190.

Chase, I and Baumer, N. (2021). [Making Visits to the Dentist Easier for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#), Harvard Health Publishing, Child & Teen Health, health.harvard.edu, accessed March 2022.



Whiten your teeth at home

The government recently [relaxed recommendations](#) on when people should wear masks. If you live in a place that's considered at low to medium risk for COVID-19, it may be okay to finally uncover your face.

Ready to toss that bedazzled mask and show off your beautiful smile? Make sure your teeth are sparkling bright.

The American Dental Association acknowledges that whitening treatments, whether do-it-yourself kits or professional procedures, can be effective at removing stains. Here are some options you can try at home.

Whitening strips

These thin, elastic strips stick directly to the surface of your teeth. They're typically coated with a peroxide gel that dissolves stains safely and gradually. Whitening strips should be applied once daily until you see results.

Whitening (bleaching) trays

These kits contain a tray designed to fit gently around the front and back of your teeth. Some trays are pre-filled with whitening solution, while others come with gel-filled syringes. Whitening trays are usually worn for longer periods of time than whitening strips, and sometimes overnight.

LED light kits

This powerful whitening method consists of an LED light system, mouthpiece, peroxide gel and a charger. After whitening gel is applied to your teeth, the mouthpiece bathes them in blue LED light, which enhances the whitening effects.

Whitening toothpaste

Most whitening toothpastes contain a mild abrasive powder that polishes teeth and removes stains. Some toothpastes also contain hydrogen peroxide for more noticeable results. Because there are fewer bleaching ingredients, you can expect mild whitening effects.

Talk to your dentist first

Always ask your dentist's advice before trying at-home whitening. You may want to discuss professional teeth whitening, performed in the office. Dentists use much stronger peroxide solutions, in combination with light or heat, and can get your teeth brighter faster. But remember, teeth whitening is considered a cosmetic procedure and won't be covered by your dental plan.

[Read about cosmetic dentistry](#)



Exercise and your teeth

With spring just around the corner, many of us are looking forward to returning to our outdoor exercise routines. That fresh breeze is calling all bikers, runners, skateboarders and rollerbladers! As we prepare to head outside for one of these activities, don't forget about your mouth when it comes to safety gear and taking precautions to protect your teeth.

Tips to protect your teeth

Use the right gear: A properly fitted helmet will help protect your head and face from injury. Using one with a face shield can further protect your teeth. A mouthguard also can help protect your teeth. The right equipment, including shoes (and your bike if you're cycling) can help prevent injuries.

Familiarize yourself with the area: If you're biking or running outside, know what to expect along the way. If you're on a trail, you should know the trail rating and be prepared for any obstacles, including the weather conditions.

Know your skill level: Match your skills precisely to the terrain or trails you take on. Stop for a bit if necessary, and build up your skills over time.

Avoid sugary sports drinks: Most beverages, including energy and sports drinks, contain large amounts of sugar and acid, which can feed bacteria in the mouth. Staying away from these and drinking water instead can help prevent gum and tooth decay.

Do our teeth hurt when you exercise outside?

As if aching muscles aren't enough to deal with after a day of vigorous outdoor exercise, many runners and bikers find that their *teeth* actually hurt during their workout.

Cold air: Tooth sensitivity can act up with exposure to very cold or hot air. Breathing through your nose instead of your mouth can reduce this symptom. Sensitive teeth may also be a sign of gum disease, so you may want to talk to your dentist if your teeth react to cold air like this.

Breathing through your mouth also can cause dry mouth—which means you're more prone to cavities. Saliva helps wash away debris and neutralizes acids from bacteria and food. Additionally, during high-intensity training, your saliva composition and consistency become stickier, trapping decay-causing sugars and acids.

Teeth grinding: Do you find yourself clenching your teeth or jaw when you're really working out? Running can cause reverberations through your body, and your teeth will feel this too if they are locked together. Relaxing your jaw and keeping your muscles loose and your teeth apart can reduce the force on your teeth. Wearing cushioned shoes that are not worn out also can help.

Sinus infection: Infected or inflamed sinuses can cause tooth pain while you run or walk. Treating this condition may reduce this symptom.

If you do get an injury

A fractured or cracked tooth may or may not hurt, depending on nerve exposure. Until you can see a dentist, rinse your mouth with warm water to clean the area surrounding the affected tooth, and apply a cold compress to reduce swelling.

If you've knocked out a tooth, retrieve the tooth, holding it by the top, not the root. Rinse the root with water and place it back into the socket (or place it in water for transport).

For any tooth injury, contact your dentist immediately.

The bright side

Although exercise can pose a safety risk, there is a vital link between working out and good dental health! One study published in the [Journal of Periodontology](#) found that people who maintain a normal weight and get the recommended amount of exercise had a 40% lower likelihood of having periodontitis, or severe gum disease. So don't hesitate to get out there and work up a sweat this spring!

Sources:

Kuzma, C. Runners World, 2017. [5 Ways Runners are Messing Up Their Teeth](#). Accessed March 2022.

McGann Facial Design, 2018. [Ever Wonder Why Your Teeth Hurt While You Run?](#) Accessed March 2022.

United Concordia Dental, Oral Health Resources. [Lost a Tooth? Stay Calm. . . How to Minimize the Damage and Save Your Smile](#). Accessed March 2022.

Wyndham, L. Dental News, 2020. [How Can Exercise Improve Oral Health?](#) Accessed March 2022.



Tooth or False?

Excessively drinking alcoholic beverages increases your risk for oral cancer.

TRUE

Drinking alcohol is a risk factor for oral cancer. While the disease is not always preventable, by limiting your alcohol intake and following a healthy lifestyle, you can significantly reduce the likelihood of developing it.

Oral cancer is a general term referring to any cancer that begins in the oral cavity (mouth), which includes the lips, cheeks, tongue, roof and floor of the mouth, gums, and teeth. Oral cancer can also occur in the minor salivary glands, often in the roof of the mouth.

In addition to alcohol and tobacco use, other risk factors include:

- UV light exposure, usually from sunlight and/or tanning beds
- [Human papillomavirus \(HPV\) infection](#)
- Poor diet
- [Weakened immune system](#)
- Certain genetic syndromes, such as [Fanconi anemia](#) or [dyskeratosis congenita](#)
- [Graft versus host disease \(GVHD\)](#), which can occur after bone marrow or stem cell transplant
- Untreated periodontal (gum) disease

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