

Men and Oral Health

Are men serious about dental health? Several recent surveys have asked men and women questions about their oral health hygiene habits and it appears the men may lag behind the women surveyed concerning oral health. It is vital to establish a pattern of good oral health practices to maintain and improve not only oral health but also overall health and well-being.



Don't wait until you have a more serious oral health problem to visit your dentist. Make regular dental visits and see a dentist immediately if you have a problem.

How Do Men Rank in Oral Health?

According to the American Dental Association's Public Opinion Survey (2003) men and women report the following differences in their oral health habits:

Brushing teeth twice per day

49% of Men
57% of Women

Brushing their teeth after every meal

21% of Men
29% of Women

Report having a dentist

75% of Men
89% of Women

The Journal of the American Dental Association in 2003 examined similar findings from National Health Interview Surveys (1989 and 1999). In these surveys, the number of men who reported having had a dental visit in both years, 5% less than women who reported having a dental visit. A similar survey in 2004 also found that, compared to women, the men surveyed were twice as likely to have never contacted a dentist or other dental health professional. In addition to these surveys, information from a group of commercially insured subscribers in 2005 indicated that 10% fewer men (67% of men and 77% of women) had a dental visit, and 12% fewer men (56% of men and 68% of women) received preventive dental care.

Too Busy for Oral Health?

This information indicates that some men may be neglecting their oral health. As suggested in the landmark 2000 Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health in America, overlooking your oral health could contribute to serious problems because oral health is essential to general health and well being. So, if you are like some of the men in these surveys and have not been taking the care of your teeth and gums seriously, the facts below may motivate you to pay closer attention to keeping your mouth healthy.

What's at Stake?

- Poor oral hygiene can result in the development of tooth decay and periodontal (gum) disease, which may lead to losing teeth.
- Tobacco users are at increased risk for periodontal disease.
- People with diabetes are at higher risk for developing periodontal disease.
- Maintaining good oral health is essential to reducing bad breath.

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oral health
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Men and Oral Cancer

Oral cancers are more than twice as common in men as in women. According to the American Dental Association (ADA), oral cancer can be checked for during a regular dental visit. When detected late, the overall five-year survival rate for oral cancer is about 50%.

Oral cancer can affect any area of the oral cavity including the lips, gum tissue, cheek lining, tongue, and the hard or soft palate.

The American Cancer Society says:

- 90% of patients with oral cancer use tobacco, and 75%-80% of all patients with oral cancer drink alcohol frequently. The American Dental Association (ADA) says that alcohol use combined with smoking greatly increases oral cancer risk. The ADA also indicates that more than 25% of oral cancers occur in people who do not smoke and have no other risk factors.
- More than 30% of patients with cancer of the lip have outdoor jobs associated with prolonged exposure to sunlight.
- The likelihood of developing oral cancer increases with age, especially after age 35. Half of all oral cancers are diagnosed in people older than 68 years old.
- A diet low in fruits and vegetables is associated with an increased risk of developing cancer of the oral cavity.
- The human papillomavirus (HPV) may contribute to the development of approximately 20% - 30% of oral cancer cases.

Men Benefit from Regular Dental Care

For men who may be neglecting their oral health, the message is straightforward: Don't wait until you have a more serious oral health problem to visit your dentist. Make regular dental visits and see a dentist immediately if you have a problem. Regular dental visits can aid in the prevention, early detection and treatment of tooth decay, periodontal diseases and oral soft tissue disease.

The frequency of dental visits should be based on individual need – some people will need to see the dentist more often than others. More frequent visits may be necessary for people with increased risk for oral diseases due to factors such as age, tobacco and alcohol use, periodontal diseases, poor oral hygiene, and health conditions.

Between dental visits, remember to:

- Practice good oral hygiene by brushing with fluoride toothpaste and flossing daily
- Have orally-healthy nutrition with a balanced diet including at least five servings of fruits and vegetables everyday, and limit starchy and sugary snacks
- Use mouthguards and other protective gear to prevent oral-facial sports injuries
- Use car seatbelts
- Wear bike helmets
- Do not use tobacco in any form
- Limit alcohol use
- Avoid unprotected sun exposure to lips.

Sources: American Academy of Periodontology: www.perio.org

American Cancer Society: www.cancer.org

American Dental Association: www.ada.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov

U.S. Surgeon General's Oral Health Report: www.surgeongeneral.gov