

8 STEPS YOUR DENTIST WANTS YOU TO TAKE

Oral health has taken a backseat over the past year, but the experts are here to help keep your teeth in tip-top condition...

Chances are, you've spent some time scrutinising your smile over a Zoom chat or Teams meeting during the past year.

A crooked canine or a yellow incisor may have become your on-screen nemesis. But what's been going on below the gumline?

While 84% of us said we'd like to alter our smiles*, the pandemic has wreaked havoc on our oral health.

A 'dental disaster' according to the FDI World Dental Federation, 55% of the nation have neglected their teeth during lockdown**. The consequences of COVID-19 have led to an increase in tooth decay and gum disease. To avoid tooth loss and keep your smile intact, follow these steps from the dental experts...

1 MOUTHWASH WITH CARE

'Use mouthwash at a separate time to brushing - after a snack or lunch - but never directly after brushing as your toothpaste has more benefits than mouthwash,' advises award-winning dental hygienist, and founder of London Hygienist, Anna Middleton.

'Opt for mouthwash without alcohol, which can upset the pH and microbiome of your mouth. And avoid mouthwash designed to treat bleeding gums unless advised by a dental professional.'

2 UNDERSTAND YOUR ORAL MICROBIOME

'The mouth is full of bacteria, fungi, viruses and protozoa, known as the oral microbiome,' explains dentist Dr Tony Smith, founder of the Teeth4Life app.

'Everyone's is different. Our saliva could actually be used for identification.

'Antibiotics or poor oral hygiene can alter the microbiome. Unchecked, it can cause permanent damage to the hard and soft tissue. The teeth can decay, and bone can be lost through gum disease.

'If oral hygiene is improved, the changes are often reversible.'



3 CHECK FOR PLAQUE

'Monitor your cleaning with disclosing tablets. These chewable tablets contain a harmless vegetable dye that sticks to plaque to show where it's building up. Toothpaste can't do its job if it's on plaque rather than your teeth,' says Dr Smith.

Plaque, the sticky film that covers your teeth, contains bacteria which release acids when we consume sugars. These acids attack enamel, leading to erosion and cavities.

When plaque builds up, it hardens into tartar around your gum line, causing swelling - an early sign of gum disease***.

4 ACID ATTACK

'Keep sugars and acids to mealtimes only and try not to have more than 3-4 sugar or acid 'attacks' per day,' says Anna.

Tooth enamel is weakened and it takes around 30 minutes for saliva to neutralise the acid. Brushing during this time could damage enamel.

'Instead, rinse your mouth with water or sugar-free mints and gums with Xylitol for added protection.'

Drink fizzy drinks through a straw to avoid bathing your teeth in acid.



Oral health equals overall health

The mouth can tell us a lot about your overall health. Bleeding gums and recurrent ulcers can be signs of health complications. Poor oral health can put you at risk from further issues,' says Anna. 'Bacteria associated with gum disease can migrate to other parts, such as heart and brain.'

People who have poor oral health – like gum disease or tooth loss – have higher rates of cardiovascular problems, such as heart attack or stroke****. And recent research suggests bacteria that cause gum disease are also associated with the development of Alzheimer's and dementia*****

'One study even revealed that people who suffer from gum disease were more likely to experience complications as a result of COVID-19.'

5 IT TAKES TWO

'The message is simple: brush twice a day – morning and night – for two minutes, using a rechargeable power brush with a small head,' explains Dr Smith, whose Teeth4Life app only went live earlier this year.

Anna adds: 'To maximise cleaning, ensure the brush is half on the tooth, half on the gum at a 45-degree angle into

the gums and then gently let the brush glide – no scrubbing. Spit the toothpaste out, but do not rinse. Always try to leave some fluoride behind to protect the teeth from decay.'

TRY... Regenerate Enamel Science Advanced Toothpaste (£10, Boots). It regenerates enamel mineral to reverse the early enamel erosion process.



6 MAKE A DATE WITH YOUR DENTIST

'Research indicates that seeing the same dentist reduces your chances of needing treatment by 30%,' says Dr Smith.

Don't skip routine dental visits for check-ups and hygiene visits – once or twice a year.



7 KEEP TRACK OF CHANGES

'Nothing has been produced that looks as good, lasts as long or is as cheap as your natural teeth,' says Dr Smith.

Ask your dentist for your BPE (Basic Periodontal Examination) and BEWE (Basic Erosive Wear Examination) scores. Record them in the free Teeth4Life app to monitor improvements and changes. Set a reminder to check for oral cancer.

8 INTO THE GROOVE

Clean between teeth daily, with interdental brushes. 'Use the largest size possible to maximise plaque removal,' advises Anna. 'If the gaps are too tight, floss, and if you struggle, try an air or water flosser. If you notice bleeding when cleaning, don't stop! Bleeding gums is a sign of gum disease and inflammation. Persevere and it should improve. If there's no improvement after two to three weeks, consult a hygienist.'

WORDS: SUKARNY; PHOTOS (POSED BY JACQUEL): GETTY IMAGES; AND **ORAL HEALTH FOUNDATION ***COLGATE.COM ****HARVARD HEALTH PUBLISHING *****NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING