

WOMEN'S HEALTH NEWS

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Center of Excellence in Women's Health ♦ Neighborhoods Initiative Division of Community Health
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What is Oral Health & Why

is it Important?

“Oral” refers to the mouth, which includes the teeth, gums, and supporting tissues. Good oral health is key to living each day comfortably. These tissues



allow you to speak, smile, sigh, kiss, smell, taste, chew, swallow, and cry. They also let you show a world of feelings through expressions. Taking good care of these tissues can prevent disease in them and throughout your body.

Most of us think of problems with the mouth in terms of cavities, toothaches, and crooked or

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Stained teeth; however the health of your mouth can be a sign of your overall health. Many serious diseases, such as diabetes, HIV, and some eating disorders show their first signs in the mouth. That is why it is important to have complete, regular oral exams.

Source: *The National Women's Health Information Center.*
www.womenshealth.gov.

Recipe: Fruit Kebabs with Creamy Orange Dip

6 ounces light or fat-free cream cheese, softened
¼ cup frozen orange juice concentrate, thawed
2 medium green kiwi fruits, peeled
16 pineapple chunks, canned in their own juice
and drained or fresh pineapple
16 red grapes

8 large strawberries, cut in half and stems removed
16 mandarin orange slices, canned in water or light syrup, drained
Ground cinnamon
8 8-inch wood or metal skewers

In a small mixing bowl, beat the cream cheese and orange juice with an electric mixer on medium-high speed for 1 to 2 minutes, or until smooth. (Mixture can be covered and refrigerated for up to four days.)

Cut each kiwi fruit in half and quarter each half (you will have 16 pieces). Assemble the kebabs by threading the fruit on the skewers in the following order: pineapple, strawberry, kiwifruit, grape, mandarin orange. Repeat. To serve, arrange the kebabs on a large plate, or for a more festive presentation, stick a few of the skewers into a piece of fruit, such as an apple or orange. Sprinkle the cinnamon over the dipping sauce.

Serving size: 1 fruit kebab and 2 tablespoons dip, makes 8 servings.



Recipe Source: American Heart Association, *Healthy Recipes Kids Love*, 2005.

Prevention of Oral Health Problems

The most common oral health problems are cavities and gum disease.

Dental Cavities: Cavities are holes in the teeth that are created by bacteria (germs) found naturally in your mouth. The bacteria mix with your saliva and bits of food in your mouth to form a coating (plaque) that sticks to your teeth. Acids in the plaque can wear away the teeth and get inside the teeth to create holes, or cavities.



Gum Diseases: Gum disease is caused by infection or plaque around your teeth and is a common cause of tooth loss in adults. Gum diseases are more often seen as people age, with most people showing signs of them by their mid-30s.

The first stage and most common type of gum disease is **gingivitis**. Gingivitis irritates the gums and causes them to bleed and swell. **Periodontitis** is a more serious type of gum disease caused by bacteria in the mouth that, if left untreated, gets worse as infection forms between the teeth and gums. This causes your gums to grow away from teeth and lose supporting bone. If the teeth can't be supported, they could fall out.

Healthy Woman News is brought to you by the **Chicago Women's Health Initiative**, a collaboration between the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and five beauty shops in Chicago.

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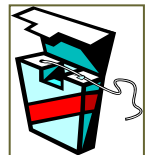
It is not the intention of the Chicago Women's Health Initiative to provide specific medical advice, but rather to provide women with information to better understand their health. The Chicago Women's Health Initiative urges you to consult with a qualified health care provider for diagnoses and for answers to your personal questions.

Follow these simple steps to prevent cavities and gum diseases:



1. **Brush and Floss:** Brush your teeth at least twice each day – first thing in the morning and before going to bed. Floss your teeth every day to clean between teeth.

- Gently brush all sides of your teeth with a soft bristled brush and fluoride toothpaste.
- Don't forget to brush along the gum line and lightly brush your tongue.
- Ask your dentist or dental hygienist to show you the best way to floss your teeth.
- Change your toothbrush at least every three months or earlier if the toothbrush looks worn.
- If you wear dentures, remove them at night and clean them before putting them back in the next morning.



2. **Have a healthy lifestyle:** Eat healthy meals and limit sugary or starchy food between meals.

- Don't smoke. Smoking raises your risk for many oral health problems.
- If you drink alcohol, do not drink more than one drink per day if you are a woman or two drinks per day if you are a man. Heavy alcohol use raises your risk for oral and throat cancers.
- Eating raw fruits and vegetables and dairy products can help to lower your risk of cavities.

3. **Get regular check ups:** Having an oral exam twice each year will help find signs of problems early. Make an appointment right away if your gums bleed often, if you see any red or white patches on the gums or tongue, have pain mouth/jaw pain that won't go away, have sores that do not heal within two weeks, or if you have problems swallowing or chewing.



4. **Ask questions and talk to your health care providers about keeping your mouth healthy:** Your dentist may suggest that you do different things to keep your mouth healthy.

Other Types of Oral Health Problems

Other types of oral health problems include cold sores, canker sores, fungal or yeast infections, dry mouth syndrome, and cancer.

Cold Sores: Cold sores are caused by the Herpes Simplex Virus Type 1 (HSV-1). They usually form on the lips, but may also appear under the nose or chin. Getting too much sun, colds, and stress can trigger the virus and cause cold sores. You can buy medicine at the drug store or grocery store to relieve the pain. If cold sores are a problem for you, talk with your doctor or dentist.

Canker sores: Canker sores are ulcers in the mouth that have a white or gray base and a red border inside. The cause of canker sores is unknown but fatigue, stress, or allergies can increase your chances of getting them. Canker sores are usually tiny and heal by themselves in 1 to 3 weeks. Sores that are larger than 1 centimeter may need to be treated with medicine. There is no proven way to prevent canker sores, but if you get them often, talk to your dentist or dental hygienist.

Oral fungal or yeast infections (candidiasis): These infections appear as flat or slightly raised red or white lesions in the mouth. They are common among denture wearers and occur most often in people who are very young, elderly, those who have a problem



with their immune system, and people with dry mouth syndrome. Asthmatics or people who use oral steroidal mouth sprays to control their asthma are also at risk for oral fungal infections. These can be prevented with good oral hygiene. Talk with your dentist or dental hygienist about medicines that may be helpful if you have a problem with these infections.

Dry mouth syndrome: Dry mouth syndrome may make it hard to eat, swallow, taste, and speak. It happens when salivary glands fail to work right, often as a side effect from medicines or from other health problems. Talk to your dentist or another health care provider if you are concerned about dry mouth syndrome.

Oral cancer: This cancer most often occurs in people over the age of 40. Because oral cancer is not usually painful, it is often found at late stages when it is harder to treat. The most common sites of oral cancer are on the tongue, lips, and floor of the mouth. Use of tobacco, especially with alcohol, is the main cause for these cancers. Oral cancer often starts as a tiny, unnoticed white or red spot or sore anywhere in the mouth. Regular dental exams are important for early detection of oral cancers.

Source: The National Women's Health Information Center. www.womenshealth.gov.

Oral Health & Women

Women need to have good oral hygiene at all stages of their lives. Changing hormone levels during puberty, your monthly period, pregnancy, and menopause cause changes in your mouth. These hormone changes can cause:

- Frequent cold sores and canker sores
- Gingivitis during puberty and pregnancy
- Dry mouth (often also linked to using certain medicines)
- Changes in taste
- Increased risk of gum disease
- Bone weakness around menopause



Choosing Toothpaste and Mouthwash

There are so many types of toothpastes to choose from! Some say they're made for whitening, others for reducing gingivitis and plaque, and others for sensitive teeth. You should feel good



choosing whatever brand and flavor you like if you know these basics:

- If the toothpaste you choose contains fluoride and its box has the American Dental Association's (ADA) seal of acceptance, it is good for your oral health. Beyond that, choosing your toothpaste based on what it claims to do is a personal choice.
- Mouthwashes claim to freshen your breath, but they really only mask breath odor for a few hours. If you must constantly use a breath freshener to hide bad mouth odor, see your dentist.



- If you need extra help controlling plaque, your dentist might suggest using an antiseptic mouth rinse. Many of these products are accepted by the ADA because they reduce plaque and gum disease, and help kill the germs that cause bad breath.
- You also may want to use a fluoride mouth rinse, along with brushing and flossing, to help prevent tooth decay.



Source: *The National Women's Health Information Center.*
www.womenshealth.gov



Recipe: Corn Chowder

- 1 Tablespoon Olive Oil
- 1 Tablespoon Butter
- 1 large onion, minced
- 3 cups thawed frozen corn
- 2 medium-sized russet baking potatoes (about 1 pound, diced)
- 3 cups skim milk
- Black pepper to taste
- ¼ – ½ teaspoon salt, optional

Heat oil and butter in large saucepan over medium heat. Stir in onion and cook until tender, about 5 minutes. In a blender, mix one cup of corn with one cup of milk. Pour into pan with onions. Add remaining corn and milk, potatoes, salt and pepper to the pan. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook 15–20 minutes, or until potatoes are tender. Do not allow soup to boil.

Serves 8.

Nutrition information per serving: 146 Calories, Total Fat: 3.5 grams, Cholesterol: Less than 6 grams, Sodium 125 milligrams, Carbohydrate: 25 grams, Dietary Fiber: 2 grams.

Adapted from Mission St. Joseph's Institute for Cardiopulmonary Health, www.msj.org

