

## **Good oral hygiene is a must for Canada's seniors**

Thanks to healthier lifestyles, as well as advances in oral and medical care, Canadians can expect to keep most, if not all of their natural teeth as they enter their senior years. But keeping those teeth healthy can be a challenge.



According to the Canadian Health Measures Survey, 53% of adults ages 60 to 79 do not have dental insurance, and the lack of coverage is one of the main reasons why they don't see a dental professional. Because older adults have specific dental needs, seniors and their caregivers should be aware of the importance of regular dental care.

Bacteria from the mouth can travel and develop into serious infections affecting overall health, specialists say. Many medications can cause dry mouth, a condition that can contribute to cavities and other oral problems. Seniors also develop more cavities on the roots of their teeth than younger adults. As a result, all older adults should be encouraged to brush natural teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and clean in between the teeth at least once a day. Dentures (full or partial) should be cleaned and soaked daily and the gums should be brushed and massaged, either with a soft toothbrush or with a warm, damp cloth.

Whether you're at home or in a long-term care residence, good oral hygiene coupled with regular treatments by a dental hygienist can help to prevent more serious health problems. Together, you can plan a daily oral care routine that will keep your teeth, and you, healthy for life.

More information on this topic is available online at [www.dentalhygienecanada.ca](http://www.dentalhygienecanada.ca).

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## Join the fight against early dental decay

We don't easily associate cavities and gum disease with our little ones, but in reality these problems can begin very early.

A 2013 report from the Canadian Institute of Health Information revealed that severe tooth decay and cavities, both of which are highly preventable, are now the leading cause of day surgery in this country among children ages 1 to 5 years. Approximately 19,000 children under the age of 6 undergo day surgery each year to treat dental decay. While these figures are alarming, parents can reduce the risks by instilling good oral hygiene habits early, as follows:



- Wipe baby's mouth and gums with a clean, wet cloth or piece of gauze after feeding.
- Avoid fruit punches and other sweetened drinks in baby bottles, especially before bed.
- Reduce the frequency of nighttime feedings.
- Use only pacifiers with an orthodontic design, and don't dip them in sugary substances.
- Avoid transfer of your saliva onto items used by baby, including bottles, cups, and pacifiers. Bacteria spread.
- Gently clean newly erupted teeth with a small, soft toothbrush.
- Rinse your child's mouth with water immediately after any liquid medication is given.
- Check for early warning signs by lifting up baby's top lip. White, chalky teeth, or brown or black stained teeth, indicate a problem. Contact your dental professional immediately.
- Gradually introduce fresh fruits and vegetables to the diet. These foods, which require chewing, stimulate saliva flow and help to neutralize acids.
- Begin regular dental visits by age one.

Additional tips and information are available online at [www.dentalhygienecanada.ca](http://www.dentalhygienecanada.ca).

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## **Teach kids how to take care of their teeth**

Good oral health is essential to total health and well-being at any age. Help your children to develop daily oral hygiene habits that will give them something to smile about. Here are some helpful tips:



**Children ages 3–6:** Help your little ones to brush their teeth twice a day, using a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste. Show them how to brush every tooth surface and their tongue, and make sure that they spit out the toothpaste when they are done.

**Children ages 6–13:** Encourage them to begin flossing once a day, in addition to brushing twice a day for two minutes with fluoride toothpaste. Help children to make healthy food choices, avoiding sweets and sugars. Have them fitted for a sports mouthguard to be worn during athletic activity.

**Teenagers:** Remind them to brush their teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, rinse with an antibacterial mouthwash, and clean in between the teeth at least once a day. Help your teenager to eliminate tobacco use and eat nutritious foods that are low in sugar. Teens should also remember to wear a sports mouthguard during active play.

More information about oral care is available online at [www.dentalhygienecanada.ca](http://www.dentalhygienecanada.ca).

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## **Oral hygiene is crucial to overall good health**

The eyes may be the windows to the soul, but the mouth is a gateway to the rest of the body. While many of us think that the worst outcome of poor dental hygiene is tooth loss, research now shows a direct link between oral health and your overall well-being.



Periodontal disease, a disease of the gums and supporting bone, has been linked to a number of serious illnesses including diabetes, lung and heart diseases, and stroke. There are millions of bacteria in the mouth, and ignoring oral health routines can lead to inflammation, causing these bacteria to grow and spread at alarming rates, even into the bloodstream.

We do have a partner, however, in this fight for better oral health. Dental hygienists point out that they are primary health care providers who will guide us every step of the way. Whether working in a dental office, a clinic, a hospital, a retirement home or in the community, a dental hygienist is a licensed, oral health care professional who has the skills, knowledge, and judgment to facilitate early detection of oral health problems and diseases. At a dental visit, your hygienist will assess your health history, examine your head and neck, and check your mouth. Together you will develop an oral hygiene plan that includes prevention and treatment therapies to ensure the best overall health possible. If necessary, your dental hygienist may refer to you other health care professionals.

The simplest way to locate this professional is through a dental office – and there are many dental hygienists who own and operate their own independent practices. Additional tips and information on this topic is available online at [www.dentalhygienecanada.ca](http://www.dentalhygienecanada.ca).

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## **Embrace dental hygiene for life**

Pay attention to your mouth, dental hygienists say. Indeed, these professionals are our partners in disease prevention, encouraging us to brush, floss, and rinse to protect our overall good health. And they do more than just clean teeth. Dental hygienists are primary health care providers who can guide us every step of the way. They play a vital role in treating oral health problems and detecting more serious issues in the mouth. Prevention today will protect you tomorrow so additional information on this topic is also available online at [www.dentalhygienecanada.ca](http://www.dentalhygienecanada.ca).

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## **A dental hygienist is your partner in prevention**

Oral health is the cornerstone of overall physical, social, and mental well-being. Without a good oral hygiene plan, we put ourselves at risk for serious health complications. In fact, research shows that unchecked plaque on the teeth can result in gingivitis and tooth decay. Even worse, it can lead to periodontal disease, which is now recognized as a risk factor for diabetes, lung and heart diseases, and stroke.



A dental hygienist has the skills, knowledge, and judgment to facilitate early detection of these issues. They can also help us to maintain good oral health and prevent oral diseases across the lifespan. At a dental visit, a hygienist will examine your mouth, head, and neck and recommend preventive treatments, such as dental sealants or fluoride when warranted. A hygienist can also custom-fit you with a mouthguard if you're involved in sports where orofacial injury is a risk. As importantly, a dental hygienist will work with you to develop an oral hygiene plan based on six simple steps:

1. Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.
2. Floss daily.
3. Rinse with an antiseptic mouthwash once a day.
4. Eat healthy foods and avoid sugary treats.
5. Eliminate tobacco use.
6. Schedule regular dental visits.

Dental hygienists are a vital partner in disease prevention, working in a variety of settings and can guide you to the peak of oral health every step of the way. More information is available online at [www.dentalhygienecanada.ca](http://www.dentalhygienecanada.ca).

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## Flash a memorable smile in just minutes

Dedicate yourself to a daily oral hygiene routine and the benefits will last a lifetime, dental hygienists say. This commitment is the cornerstone of overall health and well-being and it is the key to a happy and productive life.

All it takes is five simple steps:

1. Brush your teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.
2. Floss between your teeth daily.
3. Rinse using an antiseptic mouthwash.
4. Make healthy food choices. Nutritious food low in sugar is good for both oral and overall health.
5. Choose to be tobacco free. Tobacco products can stain your teeth and increase your risk of developing oral cancer.

Add a visit to your dental hygienist every six months and all combined *you'll be smiling.*

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## **National Dental Hygienists Week: April 6–12**

April is Oral Health Month in Canada, and an important part of the celebrations is National Dental Hygienists Week, which takes place from April 6–12.

Sponsored by the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA), a national organization serving as the collective voice for more than 26,800 dental hygienists across the country, the National Dental Hygienists Week is a perfect opportunity to take up the challenge of making oral hygiene a priority in your daily life. The week's theme is "Oral Health for Total Health" and it reminds us that taking care of our mouth, teeth, and gums positively impacts our overall health.



Dental hygienists are a valuable partner in prevention. They are trained professionals who work in a variety of settings, including independent practice, with people of all ages. Responsible for more than just cleaning teeth, the dental hygienist is a primary health care provider with a goal to educate and guide their patients to embrace oral health as an essential component of overall well-being. Whether calming down toddlers at their first cleaning, or providing care to adults with periodontal disease, the dental hygienist aims to help you build a foundation for a healthy, happy smile for life.

This month, you can support these objectives by setting new dental health goals for yourself, starting with six simple steps: brush, floss, use an oral rinse, eat a healthy diet, eliminate tobacco use, and see a dental hygienist regularly. Watch for oral health promotions and events in your community throughout the month of April.

More information, including regular news, updates, articles and resources, is available online at [www.dentalhygienecanada.ca](http://www.dentalhygienecanada.ca). On Twitter, follow @theCDHA; on Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/theCDHA>.

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## Put more bite into injury prevention

The use of mouthguards in all high-risk sports has been proven to reduce the risk of orofacial injury. In fact, the chances of injury are 1.5 to 2 times greater when a mouthguard is not worn during athletic activity. Mouthguards are also a cost-effective investment in protection. The estimated cost to treat a lost front tooth over a lifetime can range from \$5,000 to \$10,000, yet the average cost of a custom-fitted sports mouthguard can be as low as \$50.



Dental hygienists tell us they are our partners in prevention and they do see first-hand, the impact of injuries to the teeth, gums, and jaws as a result of participation in sports. These professionals can custom-fit a sports mouthguard for you during a regular dental visit.

If you play hockey, soccer, football, rugby, martial arts, lacrosse, boxing, basketball, baseball, or if you enjoy BMX, skateboarding, skiing, and snowboarding, find out if your sports organization requires mandatory mouthguard protection. If it doesn't, ask why?

At [www.cdha.ca/mouthguards](http://www.cdha.ca/mouthguards), read the FAQs, tips, and other important information – and most importantly always protect your mouth at games and practices. Additional information is also online at [www.dentalhygienecanada.ca](http://www.dentalhygienecanada.ca)

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## Watch for signs of oral cancer

Dental hygienists say that we can all play an active role in reducing the risks of developing oral cancer. Our own actions can improve treatment outcomes through early detection and lifestyle choices.



Oral cancer is the 13<sup>th</sup> most common type of cancer in Canada. Researchers tell us that in 2013, an estimated 4,100 people in this country were diagnosed with the disease. Smoking, drinking, sun exposure to the lips, and HPV are all known risk factors – and much of this is preventable. So by modifying our lifestyle choices, we can certainly reduce the risk. As well, be sure to watch for changes to your mouth such as these:

- an alteration to the colour or texture of gums, cheeks or tongue
- persistent mouth sores that do not heal within 14 days
- chronic sore throat
- difficulty swallowing
- lumps in the neck (even those that don't bother you)
- mouth, or ear pain

Most cancers of the mouth can be treated if caught in time, and oral cancers are easily detected by dental hygienists who are familiar with the signs and symptoms. In order to reduce your risk, embrace a healthy lifestyle and maintain regular dental hygiene appointments that include oral cancer screenings.

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