

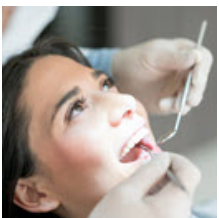


WHEN DID YOU LAST VISIT THE DENTIST?

Did you know?^{1,2}

- Globally, 3.5 billion people suffer from oral disease.
- More than 50% of children between the ages of 6 and 8 have had a cavity in their baby teeth.
- More than 50% of adolescents between 12 and 19 have had a cavity in their permanent teeth.
- One in four adults between the ages of 20 and 64 have untreated cavities.

What is oral health?



Typically, we consider oral health to be the health of our teeth and gums. Yet, more broadly speaking, oral health includes our ability to smile, speak, taste, and chew. Some of the most common diseases relating to oral health (or lack thereof) include tooth decay, cavities, gum disease, and even oral cancer.¹

While oral conditions tend to be kept separate from the more commonly known chronic conditions, they are often related. For example, gum disease, as a result of poor oral health, has been linked to other chronic diseases including heart disease and diabetes.¹

What causes oral disease?

Oral disease is linked to your lifestyle habits, such as your diet and more specifically the amount of sugar you consume (and how frequently you consume it), the use of tobacco, and your personal hygiene. Other causes include using certain medications that affect the amount of saliva in the mouth, as well as your family history of oral disease.¹

Tooth decay, cavities, and gum disease

In short, **tooth decay** refers to damage to the surface of the tooth (known as enamel). Tooth decay leads to cavities, which are holes in the teeth caused by bacteria. If left untreated, tooth decay can lead to abscess in the jaw, under the

gums.³

Gum disease, also known as periodontal disease, is a serious infection that damages the soft tissue of the gums and bone around the teeth. It causes inflammation in the gums and can be extremely painful. If left untreated, not only will the gums become infected, but the bone that supports the teeth will deteriorate. Teeth that aren't supported may become loose and may eventually be lost or need to be extracted.³



EXPERT OPINION – PRACTICING GOOD ORAL HEALTH

The good news is that most oral diseases are preventable or can be treated when detected early on. Here are a few things you can do to practice good oral health:

“Brush your teeth and tongue two or three times a day, as soon as possible after meals, especially before sleeping and use a fluoride mouthwash appropriately. Try not to eat or smoke after brushing and floss before brushing once or even twice a day,” adds Dr. Eduardo Mora, Medical Advisor at Cigna. He further recommends the following:

- Limit the amount of sugar you consume and how often you consume it
- Cut down or quit smoking
- Go for regular dental check-ups

The impact of Covid-19 on dental care

A recent study conducted in the UK found that around 50% of recipients had not visited the dentist in 18 months or more.⁴ Reasons for this included that 22% of respondents were unable to secure an appointment, while 17% of respondents noted that their dental appointments were postponed or cancelled.⁴

If you got out of the habit of going to the dentist during the pandemic, now is the time to bring back this vital part of your healthcare routine.

Going for dental check-ups

For many of us, going to the dentist isn't a particularly pleasant experience. But dental check-ups are important for your overall health and wellbeing. Remember, preventive care is key. And as untreated dental problems can cause pain and lead to tooth loss, it is important to go for regular check-ups.

During a dental check-up your dentist will look for any dental problems (such as cavities) and recommend further treatment if necessary. While it is often recommended that you go for a dental check-up every six months, depending on how healthy your teeth and gums are, this can vary from every three months to every two years. Your dentist is the best person to advise you in this regard.

Check your Cigna member portal (you can find the details on the back of your Cigna ID card) to locate a Cigna network dentist near you.

This article was reviewed by Dr. Eduardo Mora, MD, DDS at Cigna.

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