

Oral hygiene to take your breath away

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Oral disease seems to be on the increase in South Africa. The burden of disease however is spread unevenly amongst the population, with the poorer communities carrying the largest burden. Although most oral diseases are not life threatening they do affect most people during their life time and can result in pain, discomfort, loss of productivity and can also be expensive to treat. Thorough daily oral hygiene lays the groundwork for a healthy smile and is the best way to avoid oral disease and its complications.

One of the main causes of oral disease is plaque. Plaque is a sticky film of bacteria that forms on teeth and gums and release acids that attack tooth enamel after a meal or snack. Plaque also produces substances that irritate the gums making them red and tender. After a while the gums may even pull away from teeth forming pockets that fill with puss and bacteria. If this is not treated, the bone around the teeth may be destroyed which may lead to tooth loss.

Brushing teeth

The best way to remove plaque is to brush teeth twice a day with a soft bristled brush and fluoride toothpaste. The brush should be placed at a slight angle towards the gums when brushing along the gum line. It is important to use a gentle touch as it does not take much pressure to remove the plaque and scrubbing too hard may

irritate the gums. Brushing the tongue gently has also been found to be an effective way of preventing plaque build up and bad breath.

There has recently been some concern that toothbrushes may harbour microorganisms that could cause infection. The theory is that potentially harmful microorganisms may be transferred to the toothbrush from the oral cavity or even from the environment. Studies however have shown that although various microorganisms can grow on toothbrushes, there is not enough evidence to support that this will lead to any adverse oral or systemic health effects.

General recommendations for toothbrush care should be sufficient to keep patients safe. These include:

- Do not share toothbrushes
- Thoroughly rinse toothbrushes with tap water after brushing to remove any remaining toothpaste and debris
- Do not routinely cover toothbrushes or store them in closed containers
- Replace toothbrushes every 3-4 months

Green tip: Do not let the tap run while brushing teeth. This can waste litres of water.

Flossing and mouthwashes

It is also necessary to clean places where the toothbrush is not able to reach between teeth. One of the ways to achieve this is by flossing and using fluoride mouth rinses. Fluoride is a mineral that may occur naturally in all drinking water sources. Extensive research has shown that optimal levels of fluoride not only reduce caries in children and adults, but also help repair the early stages of tooth decay.

Mouthwashes are generally used for cosmetic reasons although they can aid in removing food particles and may help fight tooth decay and gingivitis. Some mouthwashes are medicated and contain local anaesthetic agents and/or anti-infective agents.

Benzydamine is indicated for the use of symptomatic relief of painful mouth and throat inflammatory conditions i.e. Andolex[®]. Benzydamine and Chlorhexadine is indicated for the relief of minimal infections and painful mouth and throat inflammation conditions also

reducing plaque development i.e. Andolex-C[®].

Chlorhexidine is a broad-spectrum antiseptic and disinfectant agent, which has the advantage of inhibiting plaque formation on the teeth. It is of little value in the control of dental caries or periodontal disease once pocketing has developed. It is available by itself (Corsodyl[®], Orosept[®]) or in combination with local anaesthetic bezocaine (Orochlor[®]). Prolonged use may lead to reversible brown staining of the teeth and tongue and is not recommended. Chlorhexidine may also be incompatible with some ingredients in toothpaste, which may cause an unpleasant taste in the mouth. At least 30 minutes should be allowed between using the mouthwash and toothpaste.

Cetylpyridium chloride is an antiseptic used for treatment of superficial infections of the mouth or throat. It is available by itself (Cepacol[®]) or in combination with the local anaesthetic benzocaine (Medi-keel A[®]).

Hexetidine mouthwash may be effective in superficial infections of the oral mucosa caused by bacteria and *Candida albicans* (i.e. oral thrush). It is available under the trade name Oraldine[®].

Hydrogen peroxide has also been used as a mouthwash when diluted to 1.5%. Because of its effervescence it may help remove debris from inaccessible cavities. It also acts as an antiseptic.

Povidone-iodine is used as an antiseptic. It may be used for bacterial or *Candida albicans* infections. It is available under the trade names: Betadine[®], Dermadine[®], Podine[®], Septadine[®] and Steridine[®].

Thymol is an antiseptic used primarily as a deodorant in mouthwashes and gargles. It is available under the trade name Compound Thymol Glycerin[®] which needs to be diluted with 7 parts of warm water or as Listerine[®], which is already diluted.

A warm saline mouthwash is ideal for its cleansing effect and can be prepared by dissolving a teaspoon of salt in a glass full of warm water.

Dental floss is needed to remove the plaque and debris that collects between the teeth and under the gum line. Waxed and unwaxed dental floss are both effective. Waxed floss may be easier to use if teeth are tightly spaced.

The role of diet in oral hygiene

Eating a balanced diet and limiting between meal snacks has been found to reduce the risk of dental disease. Foods that contain sugar of any kind can contribute to tooth decay. When plaque comes into contact with sugar in the mouth, acid is produced, which attacks the teeth for 20 minutes or more. This can eventually result in tooth decay.

The higher the concentration of sugar in the food consumed, the higher the risk of tooth decay. To help control the amount of sugar consumed, it is important to read food labels and choose foods and beverages that are low in added sugars. Added sugars are often present in soft drinks, sweets, biscuits and pastries.

In diets lacking in certain nutrients, it may be more difficult for the tissues of the mouth to resist infection. This may contribute to periodontal gum disease, which is a major cause of tooth loss in adults. Although poor nutrition does not cause periodontal gum disease directly, researchers believe that the disease progresses faster and could be more severe in patients with nutrient-poor diets.

Oral hygiene for special populations

Children

As soon as the first tooth appears it should be cleaned by wiping with a clean damp cloth every day. As more teeth appear, it

is recommended to switch to a small, soft toothbrush. It is recommended to only start using fluoride toothpaste when the child is 2 years old or if a dentist recommends it. The reason is that if children under 6 years old swallow too much fluoride, their permanent teeth may have white spots. Only use a small amount of toothpaste for children and teach them to spit out the toothpaste and rinse well after brushing.

Fluoride mouth rinse is not recommended for children under 6 years of age because they may swallow the rinse.

The elderly

The elderly are more likely to experience dental problems due to factors including:

- Loss of dental insurance
- Use of medication that may cause dry mouth (for example some antihistamines)
- Some neurological diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's or stroke which can affect the patient's ability to take care of themselves.

It is therefore extremely important that elderly patients take additional care in ensuring good oral hygiene.


Pregnant women

Pregnancy results in hormonal changes that may increase inflammation and infection in the mouth. Pregnant women

may experience red, swollen and bleeding gums known as pregnancy gingivitis. This is a form of periodontal disease, which if left untreated, may lead to severe periodontal disease.

Periodontal disease can lead to tooth loss later in life and has been associated with poor pregnancy outcomes such as preterm birth, low birth weight, gestational diabetes and pre-eclampsia. Women who are planning to become pregnant should visit their dentist and practice good daily oral hygiene.

To summarise

Maintaining a healthy smile begins at home. By spending a few minutes caring for your teeth and gums daily as well as going for regular dental check ups, ensures that you keep your teeth strong and healthy throughout your life. 

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Gentle Dental

Cipla Medpro is proud to announce the launch of Gentle Dental desensitising mouthwash, the first and only mouthwash for sensitive teeth in South Africa. It contains potassium nitrate 3% w/v and sodium fluoride 0.2% w/v, agents known to alleviate dental hypersensitivity. Gentle Dental contains no alcohol.

Gentle Dental is presented in a 150ml bottle with a unique delivery system, facilitating the exact measurement of appropriate quantities. The suggested measure is 10ml twice daily. The product is not for use in children under 12 years of age.

Gentle Dental can be used in place of, or in conjunction with other desensitising agents such as toothpastes

for sensitive teeth. Help your patients combat sensitive teeth by recommending Gentle Dental as part of their daily oral care regimen.

Gentle Dental is available in pharmacies countrywide. The suggested retail price is R31.61 (excl VAT).

For more information and queries kindly contact:
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