

UNDERSTANDING ORAL HEALTH

Common Oral Health Concerns

Cavities (Tooth Decay)

A cavity is a common infectious disease. You are not born with the bacteria that cause the cavities. Plaque is the name of the bacteria that causes cavities and it is usually passed from caregiver to child. Sharing toothbrushes, utensils, and cups, kissing and pre-testing food can pass bacteria. Once the bacteria come in contact with certain foods they absorb them and produce acid. This acid is left on our teeth and if the acid attack is not stopped (brushing, flossing) the acid eventually eats through the outer surface of the tooth and causes a hole in the tooth. It does not take long for a cavity to form on a tooth with repeated acid exposure. It is very important to remove food as well as plaque from teeth.

Oral Cancer

Approximately 30,000 Americans are diagnosed with oral cancer each year. More people die of oral cancer than cervical cancer, malignant melanoma, or Hodgkin's Disease. The chance of being alive 5 years after oral cancer is diagnosed is lower than for most other cancers.

Oral and Facial Injuries

Accidental injury is the leading cause of death for children and adolescents. Since sports and playground related injuries commonly affect the head, neck and mouth, prevention of these types of injuries is a major oral health concern. Each year nearly 35% of these injuries are severe and for children ages 0-4, 60% involve face and head injuries. In one year, the total cost for playground related injuries for children under age 15 years was 1.2 billion dollars.

Oral Health and Aging

There are often special concerns related to the oral health care of seniors. Many seniors cannot afford dental care. The ability to brush and floss is often difficult for seniors because of physical limitations. Getting to dental appointments can be a problem for seniors who lack access to transportation. Medical issues may overshadow oral health care. Multiple health concerns, the burden of taking many medications and the demands of appointments with different medical specialists might cause some seniors to neglect oral health care visits and daily care of the teeth.

Developmental Problems

Approximately 8,000 babies are born each year with cleft lip or cleft palate. It is one of the most common birth defects in the United States. Children born with these oral birth defects face many problems, including difficulties with speech and with eating. Extensive surgery is often required to correct or minimize these conditions. Cleft lip and cleft palate also affect appearance. This may lead to psychosocial problems and low self-esteem.