**What is plaque?**

Many of the foods you eat cause the bacteria in your mouth to produce acids. Sugared foods, such as candy and cookies, are not the only culprits. Starches, such as bread, crackers, and cereal, also cause acids to form. If you snack often, you could be having acid attacks all day long. After many acid attacks, your teeth may decay.

Plaque also produces substances that irritate the gums, making them red, tender or bleed easily. After a while, gums may pull away from the teeth. Pockets form and fill with more bacteria and pus. If the gums are not treated, the bone around the teeth can be destroyed. The teeth may become loose or have to be removed. In fact, gum disease is a main cause of tooth loss in adults.

One way to prevent tooth decay and gum disease is by eating a balanced diet and limiting the number of between-meal snacks. If you need a snack, choose nutritious foods such as raw vegetables, plain yogurt, cheese or a piece of fruit.

**What is daily oral health care?**

The best way to remove decay-causing plaque is by brushing and cleaning between your teeth every day. Brushing removes plaque from the tooth surfaces.

Brush your teeth twice a day, with a soft-bristled brush. The size and shape of your brush should fit your mouth, allowing you to reach all areas easily. Use toothpaste that contains fluoride, which helps protect your teeth from decay. However, a child should not use fluoridated toothpaste if he or she swallows the toothpaste.

Cleaning between the teeth once a day with floss or interdental cleaners removes plaque from between the teeth, areas where the toothbrush can't reach. It is essential in preventing gum disease.

By taking care of your teeth, eating a balanced diet and visiting your dentist regularly, you can have healthy teeth and an attractive smile your entire life.

**How do I brush my teeth?**

- Place your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle against the gums.
- Move the brush back and forth gently in short (tooth-wide) strokes.
- Brush the outer tooth surfaces, the inner tooth surfaces, and the chewing surfaces of the teeth.
- Use the "toe" of the brush to clean the inside surfaces of the front teeth, using a gentle up-and-down stroke.
- Brush your tongue to remove bacteria and freshen your breath.
- For young children, a "scrub brush" technique usually works best.
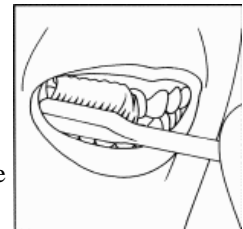
**How do I floss my teeth?**

- Break off about 18 inches of floss and wind most of it around one of your middle fingers. Wind the remaining floss around the same finger of the opposite hand. This finger will take up the floss as it becomes dirty. Hold the floss tightly between your thumbs and forefingers.
- Guide the floss between your teeth using a gentle rubbing motion. Never snap the floss into the gums.
- When the floss reaches the gum line, curve it into a C shape against one tooth. Gently slide it into the space between the gum and the tooth.
- Hold the floss tightly against the tooth. Gently rub the side of the tooth, moving the floss away from the gum with up and down motions.
- Repeat this method on the rest of your teeth.
- Don't forget the back side of your last tooth.