

Tips for Taking Care of your Mouth

Clean teeth are the most important part of a healthy mouth. Brushing twice a day and flossing once a day are key. Try these tips to help you incorporate healthy habits into your busy schedule:

- **Brush and floss your teeth after dinner:** This has the added benefit of making you less likely to reach for an after-dinner snack!
- **Keep a tooth brush and floss in the shower:** multitask!
- **Keep floss in your purse or in your car as a visual reminder.** You might even find yourself with a few minutes to spare during the day that you could spend flossing.
- **Chew sugarless gum:** after meals and snacks helps prevent tooth decay. This is especially true if it has an artificial sweetener called Xylitol in it. Drinking water that has fluoride in it can strengthen teeth and protect against decay. Chewing gum and drinking water can also help you control your weight.
- **Talk to a dentist about dry mouth:** Many people suffer from dry mouth, also called Xerostomia. Dry mouth happens when you do not have enough saliva (spit). Saliva is important for keeping the mouth wet and clean, it protects teeth and helps with digestion. Over 400 medications cause dry mouth. Dry mouth also may result from radiation treatment for head and neck cancers, emotional stress, autoimmune diseases such as diabetes, and menopause. If dry mouth is not treated it can lead to oral yeast infections, a burning feeling, tooth decay and bad breath. Dry mouth can also make it hard to swallow. If you have dry mouth, your dentist may recommend fake saliva. Sugar-free gum or candy can help you make more of your own saliva.
- **Quit smoking:** Smokers have more of the harmful bacteria that cause mouth disease. They are also four times more likely to lose teeth because of it. If you are using mints or gum to help quit smoking, choose sugar-free. Contact 802Quits [802Quits](http://www.802quits.org) for help kicking the habit.

For more information about oral health please check out the Health Department's Office of Oral Health website at <http://www.healthvermont.gov/wellness/oral-health/>