



## What your teeth can tell you about your health

The condition of your teeth can tell you many things about your health. A cavity or two might not be something to be concerned about but other conditions with your mouth and teeth can often be overlooked and be the first signs of serious problems. And, the older we get, the more important it becomes to be aware of the clues our mouths can present about our health. Overall, general health and oral health are one and the same. Your mouth may hold life-saving clues to your total body wellness that can prevent unnecessary suffering down the road with early detection and preventive care. 5 important clues to be aware of:

**#1: Diabetes and Inflamed, bleeding gums** Research has shown that effectively treating gum disease and oral infections can help to improve blood sugar levels and manage other associated conditions in people who have diabetes. If you are diabetic and have swollen, bleeding gums, then there's a good chance you're also suffering from some form of gum disease. People with poorly controlled diabetes are at a much higher risk of getting gum disease than people who do not have diabetes—more than twice as likely according to the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**. That's because people with diabetes are more susceptible to bacterial infections and less resistant to the germs that infect the gums. It is also more difficult for people with diabetes to heal after an oral surgery or other dental procedures.

**#2: Disintegrating teeth** Aging can cause regular wear and tear of the teeth and may result in reduced enamel, but not all cases of disintegrating enamel are a part of the normal aging process. If your teeth crack or crumble, it could also be a sign of gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) or acid reflux. With GERD, acid in the stomach rises back up into the esophagus. That same damaging acid can make its way to the mouth, which eventually dissolves layers from the teeth. Loss of tooth enamel is permanent and, without detection and proper treatment, can result in the rapid decay of the affected teeth. A routine check-up with your dentist can help identify signs of eroding enamel caused by acid reflux in its earliest stages.

**#3: Persistent mouth sores** It's normal to get sores in your mouth from time to time, especially if you bite your cheek or have an injury of the mouth. But if your sores don't go away after a few weeks (or keep coming back), see your dentist for an evaluation. Persistent mouth sores, particularly those that are not a healthy pink color, may be a sign of oral cancer. According to the National Cancer Institute, more than 21,000 men and 9,000 women a year are diagnosed with oral cancer in the U.S. Being over the age of 60 or a smoker also puts you at a higher than normal risk for oral cancer. What's even more alarming is that oral cancer has a very low survival rate, often because the warning signs are detected too late. That means regular self-exams and visits to your dentist are imperative to catching the disease before it has progressed to its most advanced, deadliest stages.

**#4: Receding gum line and loose teeth** Believe it or not, your dentist could be the first health care professional to detect signs of osteoporosis, not your regular physician. That's because tooth loss, a receding gum line and ill-fitting dentures are all predictors of the early- stages of osteoporosis—a disease that most commonly affects women over the age of 50 and is characterized by the gradual thinning of bone density. Because it presents few warning signs, osteoporosis is often hard to detect

until bones have become so frail that a fracture occurs. However, a dentist can observe changes in the bones that support the teeth during a routine exam, which is a good indicator of weakening bones in other parts of the body.

**#5: Plaque and gum inflammation** Did you know that the plaque that builds up on your teeth is the same plaque that can cause a heart attack or stroke? Research shows that inflammation of gum tissues is a major contributing factor in developing heart disease. This happens when oral bacteria from plaque in the mouth caused by gum disease dislodges and enters in to the bloodstream, which can lead to clot formation and thickening of the arteries, thus increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke. If you suffer from heart problems, your dentist can help by routinely examining your gums for signs of infection and instruct you on the best ways to ward off gum disease for a healthy mouth and heart.



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