

Welcome again to HEALTHPO!NT. This month's news is a bit longer, but the information is worthwhile.

Regular dental care and oral hygiene are important at any age. Good care will save your teeth, gums, time, and money. Even if you do not have dental insurance, a checkup costs much less than any dental work as a result of neglect (let alone less painful). The American Dental Association (ADA) reports that some studies link oral bacteria with heart disease, stroke, diabetes, pre-term births, and low birth weights. In 2002 there were 200 million hours of lost school and work time in the U.S., at a cost of \$70.1 billion due to dental disease. "Oral health is integral to overall health", stated Tommy Thompson, secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 2003.

Adults are more likely to have decay around older fillings, and tooth root decay due to receding gums. Gum disease can be caused by plaque, food between teeth, tobacco use, poor diet, and diseases such as anemia.

Tooth decay is also caused by dry mouth (xerostomia). This can be a side effect of many medications, including albuterol, a common asthma medication. Albuterol can also lead to gingivitis and thrush (candidiasis). Rinsing one's mouth after using an inhaler helps prevent both. Other medications that may jeopardize dental health are calcium channel blockers, some antidepressants, phenytoin, and cyclosporine. Sugar free candy or gum, artificial saliva, and oral rinses also relieve dry mouth.

Methamphetamine ("glass"; "speed"; "ice"), an illicit drug, leads to "meth mouth", which dries out the saliva glands and demineralizes the teeth. The teeth become brown with decay along the gum line.

What to do?? The following are recommendations for good dental health:

- Brush teeth at least twice a day, each time for 3-4 minutes with a fluoride toothpaste. Do not share toothbrushes, which can lead to infections. Air dry brush in upright position. Replace brush every 3-4 months.
- Floss or use interdental cleaners such as dental sticks.
- Limit between meal snacks, especially those high in sugar, such as hard candy, sugared gum, and sticky snacks.
- Maintain a healthy diet
- Drink enough fluids; keep mouth moist

**Very Important**-Have regular dental visits for checkups and cleanings. Besides looking for tooth and gum disease, dentists also check the mouth for sores (screening for cancer), palate conditions that may cause snoring, and halitosis (bad breath).

Teeth and your mouth and smile can significantly affect your psychological development and well-being in life, especially if you are a child or teenager. If financial barriers prevent you from seeing a dentist, the following are some resources that may help you find a clinic or a dentist that offers reduced rates.

[www.nj.gov/health/fhs/newborn/oralhealth.shtml](http://www.nj.gov/health/fhs/newborn/oralhealth.shtml) (then click on NJ Dental Clinic Directory on top right of page)

[www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)

