

# National Oral Health Month: The importance maintaining your teeth

Written by David Tilson

You may or may not be aware that April is National Oral Health Month. It's a time to remind ourselves about the importance of maintaining good oral healthcare and the link between oral health and our overall health and well-being. In taking steps to improve our oral health, we can help to ensure we not only have brighter smiles and stronger teeth, but healthier bodies too.

We may often overlook the connection between our mouths, teeth, and bodies. When we experience a sore tooth, bleeding or sensitive gums, we may often dismiss the discomfort and put off having it addressed by a dental professional, while pain or discomfort experienced elsewhere in the body would prompt us to see a physician. Unfortunately, disregarding a sore mouth or waiting to see if it will become better on its own can be a mistake because oral health problems can represent a warning sign for a serious health issue, such as oral cancer. According to the Canadian Dental Association, "Every year approximately 3,200 Canadians are diagnosed with oral cancer and 1,050 deaths from oral cancer occur. This devastating disease has a low survival rate because it is often diagnosed very late."

However, early detection can significantly improve the prognosis of this disease. Regular visits to a dental professional can be an important first step in early detection, as they are equipped with the necessary training and experience to identify this type of cancer.

There are other ways oral health can impact our overall health and well-being. A sore mouth, lost teeth, or oral infections can have an impact on how we verbally communicate, eat, or interact with others. Such issues can, "reduce a person's quality of life by affecting their physical, mental, and social well-being," as the Canadian Dental Association points out.

Our oral health impacts our whole body and this is why it is essential for all of us to have regular exams by a dental professional to help identify any issues early and to treat them. There are other steps we can each take between our regular check-ups to maintain our oral health and prevent issues before they begin, which include: daily brushing and flossing; not smoking; reducing our daily intake of sugars; checking our teeth, gums, and mouth regularly and following up with a dental professional as soon as possible if we notice any issues; staying active; making healthy food choices; and drinking fluoridated water. For more information and tips on maintaining your oral health and preventing disease, please feel free to visit Health Canada's Oral Health webpage at:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/topics/oral-health.html>

National Oral Health Month is also an excellent opportunity to express our appreciation and to acknowledge the many outstanding oral health professionals across Canada, including dental hygienists. They work hard to ensure our teeth and mouths are well cared for and in doing so, make a significant contribution to our overall health. We thank them for their service and commitment to keeping Canadians healthy. My father was a dentist and I remember his passion and enthusiasm for his profession and providing his patients with the best possible service. He also instilled good oral health habits in me right from childhood.

Let's all take the time during National Oral Health Month to give our teeth and mouths the extra attention they rightly deserve.