

August 2021

Oral Wellness Newsletter

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Take the bad-breath test

Want to check if you've got dragon breath? Lick the back of your hand, let it dry for about 10 seconds and then take a whiff.

If it smells funky to you, imagine how badly it reeks to people around you! If you're constantly being offered gum and breath mints, your tongue might be the nasty little culprit.

How, you might ask? The little bumps on your tongue can trap bacteria, which cause stinky breath. Sure, brushing your teeth twice and flossing once a day is a no-brainer for fresher breath. But don't forget to clean your tongue, too. Just brush gently from back to front a few times with your toothbrush and toothpaste.

For an even deeper cleaning, try a tongue scraper, available at most drug stores for under \$10. First brush and floss your teeth as usual. Then stick your tongue out and lightly scrape the entire surface once or twice. Rinse the scraper after each pass, and rinse your mouth out with water when you're all done.

If tongue cleaning doesn't fix your bad breath – or if other oral symptoms don't go away – make an appointment to talk with your dentist.

Got mask mouth? [Read ways to stop the stink](#)



Quickie whitening? Erase that thought!

A certain TikTok video shows a downright dangerous way to whiten your teeth – scrubbing them with a Magic Eraser. This cleaning sponge is meant to be used on walls, bathtubs and oven doors – never in your mouth.

Dental experts warn that Magic Erasers damage your teeth and can cause deadly harm to your health. [1] According to oral health care expert Maha Yakob, Ph.D., the main ingredient in Magic Eraser contains formaldehyde, which is poisonous if you swallow it or breathe it in. [1] Repeated use can also wear down the protective enamel on tooth surfaces. [1]

If you think your smile could use brightening up, leave it to the pros. Talk to your dentist first to make sure your teeth are healthy enough to withstand whitening treatment. If you have cavities or sensitive gums, whiteners may cause chemical burns and other issues.

Your dentist can also discuss the differences between in-office treatments as compared to over-the-counter options like whitening strips. Remember, most dental plans don't cover cosmetic services such as teeth whitening, but your dentist may be willing to offer a discount.

[Learn the pros and cons of teeth whitening](#)



HPV vaccines protect kids from cancer

In honor of National Immunization Awareness Month, United Concordia Dental is raising awareness about a vaccine that can actually help prevent oral cancer.

You've probably seen the TV commercials about HPV vaccines for kids. If you're wondering why HPV vaccination matters so much to your kids right now, it's about preventing certain cancers later in life. [2]

HPV (human papillomavirus) is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that usually clears up on its own. But for others who don't clear the virus from their systems, HPV can lead to certain cancers down the line, including oral cancers. [2] That means, your son or daughter could be exposed to HPV at 16 and end up getting an HPV-related cancer in their 30s.

You may think your child is too young to get HPV, or isn't sexually active yet. But preteens and teens can be exposed during innocent experimentation with someone they don't realize has HPV.

The CDC recommends that boys and girls get HPV vaccines at ages 11 or 12. [2] In fact, your child can get the first dose of the HPV vaccine during the same visit they get vaccines to protect against meningitis and whooping cough. [2] So talk to your pediatrician about adding it to your child's regular vaccination schedule.

[Get deeper info on HPV vaccines](#)



Oral TLC during cancer treatment

Cancer treatment can wreak havoc on your whole body, and your mouth will need extra care to prevent serious issues and infection when your immune system is weakened.

Help protect your mouth [3]

- **Brush your teeth and tongue gently within 30 minutes of eating.** Use a small, soft-bristled toothbrush and a fluoride toothpaste or baking soda with fluoride.
- **Change your toothbrush at least every 3 to 4 months.**
- **Floss your teeth with unwaxed dental floss once a day at bedtime.** (Don't start now if this wasn't part of your regular routine.)
- **Clean dentures or other mouth devices after eating.** Don't wear them while sleeping or if your mouth is irritated.

- **Rinse your mouth every 4 to 6 hours.** Mix 4 cups water with 1 teaspoon salt or baking soda – or both. Don't use mouthwash made with alcohol or hydrogen peroxide.
- **Sip water during the day to soothe dry mouth.** Squirting water into your mouth with a spray bottle or using a room humidifier can also help.
- **Use a lip moisturizer 4 to 6 times a day.** (Don't apply it within 4 hours prior to radiation therapy to the head and neck.)

Why it can be hard to eat and swallow

Some cancer treatments, such as radiation therapy to the head and neck, can cause a side effect called mucositis. [3] This uncomfortable condition can cause redness, swelling and sores inside your mouth, on your tongue or on your lips.

Try these tips for relief [3]

- Rinse your mouth right before eating to add moisture and stimulate taste buds.
- Eat small bites of food and chew thoroughly, or blend or purée your food.
- Eat soft foods, or moisten dry foods with sauces, gravy, yogurt, milk, soy milk or water.
- Don't eat foods served very hot or very cold.

If you still have trouble eating after trying these tips, talk to your doctor about seeing a dietitian to make sure you're getting enough nutrients. You can also ask about numbing medications to help with mouth pain.

More ways to soothe oral side effects



A white tongue could raise a red flag

Symptoms of oral cancer can sometimes mimic those of less serious conditions. The symptoms may not even cause pain, so knowing what to look for is important.

Most mouth cancers begin in the cells on the inside surface of your mouth. [4] When abnormal cells develop, they can cause white or red patches on the tongue, gums or lining of your mouth. [4] If you have spots that aren't going away, it could be a sign of oral cancer. [4]

Other signs include ongoing ulcers, thick or bumpy skin, or blistered and peeling skin. If you've had any of these mouth issues for more than two weeks, you should see your dentist.

Regular dental checkups are also an important cancer screening tool. Your dentist will look for early signs of oral cancer and promptly treat you to reduce the chance that precancerous cells become cancerous. Avoiding tobacco products also reduces your risk of developing mouth cancer.

[See other signs of oral cancer](#)



Back-to-college knowledge

It's that time of year...your kids are back enjoying the freedom of campus life. While late nights, junk food and caffeine are part of the experience, these habits aren't the best for their oral health. Here are 5 tips to subtly work into in your next convo.

- 1. Munch on healthier snacks**

Keep tooth decay at bay by keeping snacks generally healthy. Suggest low-sugar alternatives, such as nuts instead of chips or fruit instead of candy.

- 2. Replace soda with water**

Soda may be okay every once in a while, but it contains acids that break down tooth enamel and sugar that creates cavities. A better option is to carry a reusable bottle and stick with water to stay hydrated.

- 3. Say no to oral piercings**

They might be "in", but the truth is that face and tongue piercings can lead to gum recession, chipped teeth and infection. Skip the fad and enjoy a metal-free mouth!

- 4. Don't slack off on oral hygiene**

Students are on their own, but they don't have to lose the good oral habits they grew up with! Brushing and flossing every day leads to optimal oral health.

- 5. Take alcohol and smoking seriously**

Drinking excess alcohol and smoking in any capacity does major damage to the whole body, including the mouth. Encourage students to drink responsibly and not smoke at all to avoid tooth decay, gum disease and discolored teeth, to say the least.

[Get prepped for your teen's wisdom teeth removal](#)

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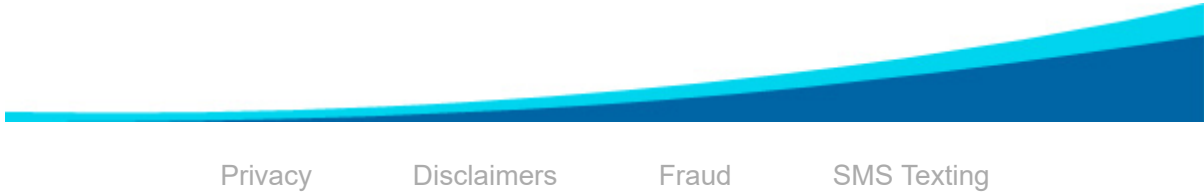
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[1] [TikTokers are using Magic Erasers to whiten their teeth – but is there any way that's safe?](#); shape.com; June 12, 2021.

[2] [HPV \(Human Papillomavirus\)](#); cdc.gov; August 2, 2019.

[3] [Mouth Care During Your Cancer Treatment](#); mskcc.org; Accessed August 2021.

[4] [About Oral Cancer](#); healthline.com; Accessed August 2021.



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