



# supporting your teeth

WHAT DOES YOUR MOUTH SAY ABOUT YOUR HEALTH?

by CNM Naturopath Gemma Hurditch

**Having a healthy smile and pleasant breath is not only an aesthetic goal, but a crucial goal for good health.**

Evidence is growing that the condition of your mouth predicts and influences your general health. Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and its complications, respiratory infections and stroke are significantly associated with dental issues such as tooth loss and periodontal disease (advanced gum disease). The health of your mouth can also influence pregnancy outcomes such as pre-term birth and low birth weight. Other conditions linked to oral health include chronic sinusitis, helicobacter pylori infection (responsible for stomach ulcers), neurological problems due to amalgam filling, and certain cancers, including oesophageal cancer.

**So how do we support the natural health of our teeth and gums?**

#### Food for gums and teeth

- Lower levels of the nutrient CoQ10 are found in gums with periodontal disease. Increase your levels by eating more parsley, broccoli, avocado and extra virgin olive oil. If periodontal disease is a problem, it is best to take supplements along with increasing natural food sources.
- Vitamin B deficiencies can cause poor oral health, including receding gums and overall sensitivity of the mucous membranes in the mouth and tongue. Mushrooms are a rich food source of B vitamins. Try shiitake mushrooms, as they are immune-stimulating
- and include lentinan, a compound which fights plaque-causing bacteria. Sardines, mackerel, cannellini beans, chickpeas, lima beans and pinto beans are also good.
- Raw onions have powerful antibacterial properties, and are also rich in quercetin, an anti-inflammatory compound which works synergistically with vitamin C to strengthen and heal gums.
- Green tea may promote periodontal health by reducing inflammation, preventing bone resorption and limiting the growth of certain bacteria associated with periodontal diseases. It is high in natural (rather than synthetic) fluoride, and can inhibit caries as well as increasing acid resistance in teeth.
- Green leafy vegetables are high in vitamin C, which reduces inflammation. Leafy greens require more chewing, thanks to their high fibre content, which is great for gums because the chewing action creates more saliva. Saliva flushes out food particles, bacteria, and plaque that may be sticking near the gum line. Broccoli and kale are particularly rich in teeth-friendly minerals such as calcium and magnesium.
- Crunchy carrots, celery and cashews are excellent at scraping away stuck-on food and plaque. Nuts also provide vitamins and minerals: such as vitamin E, which is very beneficial to the gums. Make crunchy vegetables your go-to snack or end to a meal.

- Strawberries and bell peppers are rich in both vitamin C and bioflavonoids vital for gum health, and are less acidic than citrus fruits. Acid can be damaging to tooth enamel. Citrus fruits are excellent but be sure to swish and rinse your mouth with water or green tea to reduce acid build up.
- Drink plenty of water. It rinses the teeth and mouth of acid, and removes some bacteria. Water helps the body to rid itself of toxins which put additional strain on the immune system – and a healthy immune system is better at fighting against bacterial infection in the mouth, and in the rest of the body.

**“... the condition of your mouth predicts and influences your general health.”**

#### Go natural

- Use a natural mouthwash that is free of damaging and drying ingredients such as alcohol, triclosan and sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS). Alternatives can be made using Himalayan salt, cooled boiled water and therapeutic food-grade essential oils. You will find plenty of recipes to choose from online.
- Use a natural toothpaste: there are a host of toxic chemicals in regular toothpaste. Try SLS and paraben-free brands. Sprinkling baking soda on the top of your natural toothpaste can help

gently remove surface stains.

- Oil pulling can help reduce plaque. Sesame oil is the traditional Ayurvedic choice. You can also try coconut oil. Put one tablespoon of the oil in your mouth and pull and push it through your teeth and around your mouth, spitting it out after about 10 minutes. Oil pulling is recommended first thing in the morning, and before eating or drinking.
- Regular dental hygiene should include brushing twice a day and flossing nightly. Brushing your teeth prior to eating is better for your teeth, as some foods can weaken tooth enamel, which can become worn-down by brushing too soon after eating. Leave brushing for 30 minutes, or try brushing before your breakfast.
- Investigate a naturopathic dentist in your area for more holistic care of your oral and overall health.

Naturopath Gemma Hurditch lectures at CNM (College of Naturopathic Medicine).

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