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Your Common Tooth Questions, Answered!



We've got info on everything from basic dental care to prevalent tooth problems.



When it comes to properly caring for our teeth, we all probably have a few questions we'd love answered. But when you finally get yourself to the dentist, you might not always remember them all. We've rounded up some of the most common questions regarding how to care for your teeth, issues you may encounter, and treatment that can help. Read our guide on these oft-asked questions and use them as a starting point for a conversation during your next dental appointment:

What kind of toothpaste should I be using?

Most of us have heard all the big brand names in toothpaste throughout our lives, but how many of us have actually stopped to inquire whether we're using the best kind of toothpaste?

The *American Dental Association* ([ADA](#)) only puts its stamp of approval on toothpastes that contain fluoride. But the fact is there are three types of fluoride to choose from: sodium monofluorophosphate, [sodium fluoride](#), and [stannous fluoride](#). For most people, sodium fluoride is a fine option for preventing cavities and keeping teeth healthy. However, a [systematic](#)

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Is a quick 30 second brush before you're out the door enough to keep your teeth healthy? The ADA would say definitely not. In fact, they recommend you brush twice a day, for 2 minutes each time. Make sure you brush the outer, inner, and chewing surfaces of your teeth at a 45-degree angle.

What kind of toothbrush should I use?

It can be confusing when you get to the store and see labels like soft, medium, angled bristles, flat bristles — the list goes on. However, the ADA strongly recommends using a toothbrush with soft bristles to minimize harming the gum line. Additionally, it seems multi-level bristles may do a better job of removing plaque than the flat kind. And as for manual versus electric-powered toothbrushes, the ADA gives both kinds their stamp of approval.



How often should I replace my toothbrush?

While some folks may go long periods of time using the same toothbrush, the reality is you shouldn't use the same brush for more than 3 or 4 months, says the ADA. Once the bristles look frayed, you'll want to pick a fresh one at the shop. Always rinse your brush after every use. And in case you weren't aware, you should never, ever share toothbrushes.

Why do my teeth feel so sensitive?

Ever feel pain or discomfort when having a cold beverage or eating sweets? Or maybe you experience sensitivity while you're brushing? If so, you've likely got sensitive teeth, the Mayo Clinic says. This is usually due to worn tooth enamel or exposed tooth roots. It's not a fun feeling, so make sure to visit your dentist to address the

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Mouthwash may not be as vital as brushing and flossing, but the ADA says it can be a good addition to most people's oral hygiene routine. Some benefits of using mouthwash are a reduction in plaque and tartar, prevention and control of gingivitis and tooth decay, and of course, fresher breath. Make sure to bring up what type of mouthwash you should use with your dentist as there are two types (cosmetic and therapeutic mouthwash).

I have a cavity. How did it happen?

Cavities (also known as tooth decay) are an extremely common tooth-related issue, as mentioned in the Mayo Clinic. These are small holes that develop on your teeth. Left untreated, a hole on your tooth's surface can grow larger, causing pain, potential infections, as well as eventual loss of teeth. Sugar is often seen as the culprit, but when it comes to cavities, things like frequent snacking and poor oral hygiene can cause cavities.

What is a root canal and how do I know if I have one?

If you have a cracked tooth, extreme pain while eating, swollen or darkening gums, or continuous sensitivity, you just might need a root canal, according to the American Association of Endodontists. You might also need a root canal due to a deep cavity, or because of an issue with a previous filling. Regardless, the root canal itself is a procedure which can help save your tooth. This treatment requires the infected or inflamed pulp inside your tooth to be removed, the area cleaned and disinfected as needed, and then filled with a material called gutta-percha. It is then sealed and topped with a filling or crown for additional protection. While it doesn't sound like the most fun afternoon, these days root canals are not much more painful than any other procedure thanks to use of anesthesia.

Do I really need to visit the dentist twice a year?

You've probably heard folks say that you need an annual dental cleaning, while others may tell you they visit their dentist twice a year. But according to a 2013 study published in *Journal of Dental Research*, dental visits and their frequency should actually be tailored to the individual patient. The study also suggested that people with risk factors such as smoking or diabetes (anything that may cause dental issues) may need more frequent visits throughout the year.

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