

## Oral Wellness Newsletter



### Clearing the Air on Vaping and Oral Health

We all know that smoking traditional tobacco products can impact your oral health. Not only is tobacco one of the biggest contributors to oral cancer, it can also stain your teeth and raise your risk for gum disease and tooth loss. But did you know an increasing amount of research shows the chemicals in vaping products can start to inflict damage – right where they enter and exit the body: your mouth and eyes?

There are several reasons why dentists and optometrists advise against vaping:

1. **Dry Mouth** – One of the most common side effects of vaping is dry mouth. Certain chemicals found in e-cigarettes can cause mouth dryness, resulting in bad breath, mouth sores and tooth decay<sup>1</sup>.
2. **Dry Eye** – Vaping can cause chronic dry eye and a reduction in tear film. This is where the eyes do not produce sufficient moisture to keep the eyes wet, leading to scratchy, itchy, red or sore eyes and sensitivity to light<sup>3</sup>.
3. **Eye Stress** – Over time, the use of vapes can create an imbalance in the oxygen levels in your eyes, which increases your risk of cataracts, macular degeneration and glaucoma<sup>4</sup>.
4. **Gum Irritation** – Most vapes contain nicotine – an addictive chemical. Nicotine and other chemicals in these products restrict blood flow to the gums, creating an inflammatory response in gum tissues, which can contribute to various gum diseases<sup>1</sup>.

5. **Tooth Discoloration** – The nicotine found in vapes can begin to stain your teeth over time, leading to discoloration, which may impact self-confidence and lead to a reluctance to smile<sup>2</sup>.
6. **Bacterial Changes** – Using vapes can create excess bacteria in your mouth that can cause tooth decay, cavities and gum disease. The aerosol from these products increases bacterial adhesion to tooth enamel, and the flavorings found in most of them contain similar chemical properties to those found in candies and acidic drinks<sup>1</sup>.

[Learn more](#) about the additional health risks of vaping.

**Sources:**

1. *Is Vaping Bad for Your Teeth? 7 Things to Know to Know About Its Effects on Your Oral Health*; Healthline, 2019. Retrieved March 2023.
2. *Does Vaping Stain Teeth?* SportingSmiles, 2022. Retrieved March 2023.
3. *Does vaping affect the eyes? Is it a safer alternative?* The Seeing Eye Blog; Assil Gaur Eye Institute of Los Angeles, 2022. Retrieved March 2023.
4. *The impact of vaping on ocular health: a literature review*; National Library of Medicine, 2021. Retrieved March 2023.



## Put Dental Care on Your Pet's Checklist

When it comes to keeping our furry friends healthy, establishing a good oral hygiene routine plays an important role in maintaining their overall health. It's estimated that 80% of dogs and 70% of cats show symptoms of dental disease by three years old<sup>1</sup>. Gum disease is the most common condition in dogs and cats, and early detection and treatment are critical in preventing other serious health problems. Your pet's teeth and gums should be checked at least once a year by your veterinarian for early signs of problems, but in the meantime, here are some ways you can care for your pet's teeth at home:

1. **Establish a good brushing routine** – For both pets and humans, teeth brushing is the foundation of good oral health. Specifically designed dog toothbrushes with angled handles, soft bristles and multiple heads make reaching all the tiny nooks and crannies inside your pet's mouth easier and quicker. You'll need toothpaste specific for pets, as human toothpaste contains toxic ingredients like xylitol and fluoride. Establishing a regular teeth cleaning schedule at home is an easy routine and will help keep your pet's teeth clean in between vet visits.
2. **Feed a nutritional, healthy diet** – Studies have found that dogs and cats fed exclusively soft diets, such as canned foods or human food, have significantly more plaque

and tartar buildup compared to typical dry foods<sup>2</sup>. Your pet's teeth will benefit from dry, nutrient-rich, breed-specific food, and as a bonus, it will help remove bits of plaque while producing saliva to protect their mouth.

3. **Offer dental chews** – Dental chews clean your pet's teeth while also stimulating their natural cravings for a tasty treat. These chews are designed to minimize plaque build-up and tartar while polishing their teeth. Dental chews come in a variety of shapes and sizes with features, such as ridges and nubs, that get into those hard-to-reach places.

4. **Introduce tooth wipes** – For pet owners that are unable to brush their pet's teeth or simply want to switch up their routine, dental wipes are a great solution. Tooth wipes are meant to be rubbed against their teeth to help remove plaque and are often easier to manage than a toothbrush with toothpaste.

Your veterinarian can create a personalized home dental care plan that works best for your pet's lifestyle. Watch this [video](#) to learn more about home dental care for your pet.

**Sources:**

1. *Pet Dental Health: A Prevention Angle; Exceptional Pets, 2023. Retrieved March 2023.*

2. *The Choice of Diet Affects the Oral Health of the Domestic Cat; National Library of Medicine, 2015. Retrieved March 2023.*



## Addressing Minority Health Disparities: Because Every Community Deserves Good Health

Did you know that 90% of systemic diseases can be detected through the mouth<sup>1</sup>? This is why having affordable and accessible dental care can make a big difference in your overall health. Without regular preventive dental care, oral health problems can go untreated and lead to more serious oral health conditions. While access to preventive dental care and resources has improved over the years, there are still many who struggle to get the dental treatment they need.

With April being National Minority Health Month (NMHM), United Concordia Dental understands that the conditions in the places where we live, grow, work and age significantly influence our ability to receive dental care and the outcomes of our oral and overall health. We know that:

- Nearly twice as many non-Hispanic Black or Mexican American adults have untreated cavities as non-Hispanic White adults<sup>4</sup>.

- Hispanic American adults have three times the rate of uncontrolled diabetes than non-Hispanic White adults<sup>2</sup>.
- By 2030, nearly forty percent of all Americans living with Alzheimer’s will be non-Hispanic Black or Hispanic American<sup>3</sup>.

Because we recognize the important connection between the health of the mouth and of the body, some of the things we’re doing to address oral health disparities include holding mobile dental clinics that provide free dental services to children and youth; partnering with local organizations and dental clinics through the United Concordia Dental Charitable fund to deliver free dental screenings and restorative treatments; providing education on the importance of consistent oral care; and donating to local foodbanks who give families access to nutritious foods. Our goal with these efforts is to help all individuals — regardless of race or socioeconomic background — have the opportunity for a lifetime of healthier smiles.

As a member of United Concordia Dental, you have access to our large nationwide network of dentists, making it easy to find convenient care for you and your family. View our [find-a-dentist](#) tool and schedule your next appointment with a provider today!

**Sources:**

1. 90% Prevent Oral Health Problems: Visit a Dentist Twice a Year; Academy of General Dentistry; 2012. Retrieved February 2023.
2. National Diabetes Statistic Report 2020: Estimates of Diabetes and it’s burden in the United States; CDC; 2020. Retrieved February 2023.
3. Alzheimer’s Disease in the U.S.: Social Determinants of Health; NIH/NCM; July 01, 2019. Retrieved February 2023.
4. Oral Health Surveillance Report: Trends in Dental Caries and Sealants, Tooth Retention, and Edentulism: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; US Dept of Health and Human Services United States, 2019. Retrieved March 2023.



## Dental Hygienists are Flossome

Your dental hygienist is an important team member in the dental office, and an expert on your oral health. They are one of your biggest advocates when the dentist is making informed decisions about your treatment plans. Your hygienist’s role in taking care of your teeth goes far beyond just a teeth cleaning. In fact, they handle the majority of all your preventive oral care, including:

- Taking gum measurements to check for potential gum recession or disease.
- Providing gum disease treatments.
- Capturing and developing dental X-rays.

- Conducting a disease risk assessment by reviewing your oral health history.
- Educating you on best practices for flossing, taking care of your braces and dentures, and helping you decide which toothbrush and toothpaste is best for you.
- Documenting care and treatment as it's performed and communicating that with the dentist.
- Scheduling your next preventive oral care treatment.

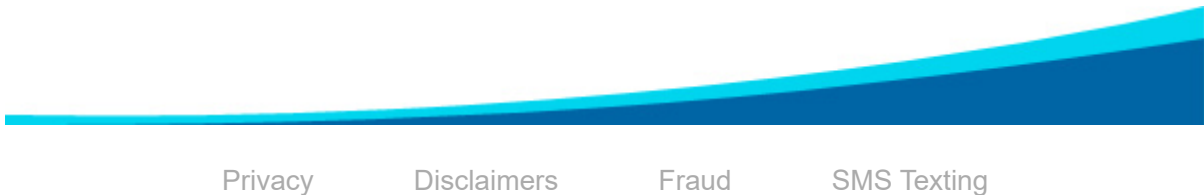
Your experience with your hygienist may also include them taking a personal interest in your life by asking you about fun trips you've taken lately, exciting family updates or how that new hobby you picked up is going. They take detailed care of your mouth and get to know you to ensure you are getting the best possible treatment. Dental Hygienist Week starts April 10th! Next time you're in for a visit, be sure to thank them for their hard work.

You can also take the [My Dental Assessment](#) to help your dental team evaluate your oral health needs and develop the best personalized treatment plan for you.

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