

Word_{OF} MOUTH

A SEMIANNUAL PUBLICATION OF THE MASSACHUSETTS DENTAL SOCIETY

Winter - Spring 2017

Cavity Conundrum





massdental.org
800.342.8747

The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) is pleased to make this publication available to our member dentists as a way of communicating important oral health information to their patients.

Information in **WORD OF MOUTH** articles comes from dental health care professionals of the MDS and other leading professional dental organizations, including the American Dental Association. If you have any questions about specific content that may affect your oral health, please contact your dentist. For news regarding oral health, visit the Public Resources section of the MDS website at massdental.org.

Your comments and suggestions regarding **WORD OF MOUTH** are always welcome. All correspondence and requests for additional copies may be forwarded to:

Melissa Carman
Director of Publications
Massachusetts Dental Society
Two Willow Street
Southborough, MA 01745-1027

or email mcarman@massdental.org.

Copyright © 2017 The Massachusetts Dental Society

-
- Robert E. Boose, EdD, *Executive Director*
 - Melissa Carman, *Director of Publications*
 - Jeanne Burdette, *Senior Graphic Design Specialist*
 - Shelley Padgett, *Senior Graphic Design Specialist*
 - Elizabeth Nilson, *Communications and Community Relations Coordinator*
 - Scott G. Davis, *Director of Strategic Communications*



Cavity Conundrum

It's a cavity conundrum. In the morning, you brush with fluoridated toothpaste and swish with antiseptic mouthwash. In the evening, you brush and floss. You may even go the extra mile to scrape the film off your tongue every day. And you definitely visit the dentist every six months to ensure your “chiclets” are in top form. But wait. What? A cavity? Why?

Cavities, a.k.a. tooth decay, are all too common in adults. More than 90% of us have had a cavity, and one in four of us has untreated cavities, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). But we don't all experience tooth decay for the same reasons.

Your degree of vulnerability to getting a cavity is influenced by multiple factors, not just your oral hygiene—although good oral hygiene is an important piece of the oral health puzzle. In addition to your daily health habits, those factors include your biology and social factors. Let's drill into some of the many causes of cavities.

Family History

If you notice that, besides yourself, your family members seem to get a lot of cavities, you may come from a long line of ancestors with deep grooves on the surface of the teeth. These grooves, which are found mainly on the molars, are hereditary and can be a cavity-causing culprit since bacteria can easily be trapped in these crevices—and hard to remove. Consider talking to your dentist about dental sealants, which are thin, protective coatings that adhere to the chewing surface of your back teeth and smooth over these grooves.

Mouth Acidity

The acidity level of your mouth may be less than ideal to protect your teeth from decay. Acid breaks down your enamel, so keeping your pH level in a neutral range is important for maintaining strong teeth that can remineralize when the enamel breaks down. You can influence your mouth's pH by reducing your consumption of acidic foods like soft drinks, coffee, nuts, and bread, and upping your intake of low-acidity foods like spinach, broccoli, blueberries, and avocados. It's also important to address with your doctor such disorders as gastroesophageal reflux disease, which can increase mouth acidity.

Overcrowded Teeth

Overcrowded teeth can trap food, making it more difficult to get your teeth really clean and creating a breeding ground for the bacteria that cause cavities. This shifting of teeth is a natural process that can be traced back to our ancestors. Because early humans used their teeth more as tools and chewed tougher raw-food diets, their teeth would wear down significantly with age. As a result, shifting occurred to counteract the increased space between worn-down teeth. Modern humans no longer experience such extreme dental wear, but the shifting still occurs. Overcrowding can be addressed by an orthodontist and may require extractions, braces, or aligners to correct.

Dry Mouth

Saliva washes away food and debris from teeth and gums, and provides disease-fighting substances that help prevent cavities and other infections. Certain medications, radiation treatments for cancers, autoimmune diseases, and hormonal changes during pregnancy and menopause can cause dry mouth, which is also known by its clinical name, xerostomia. To keep saliva flowing freely, be sure to drink plenty of water, chew sugarless gum, and ask your dentist about a hydrating oral rinse.

Fluoride

Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral found in water sources across the globe. When swallowed or applied to the teeth, fluoride helps prevent cavities by making the outer surface of teeth more resistant to the acid attacks that cause tooth decay. To make sure you're getting enough fluoride for oral health, drink fluoridated tap water (bottled water is rarely fluoridated). To see if your town's water supply is fluoridated, check the Community Water Fluoridation section at massdental.org/fluoride. You'll also want to use fluoridated toothpaste and mouthrinses.

Healthy Diet

What you put in your body is not only essential for your overall health, but also for your oral health. Eating a healthy diet—low-fat dairy, whole grains, vegetables and fruit, and limited added sugar—abstaining from drinking alcohol, and avoiding cigarettes and other tobacco products are essential behaviors for preventing tooth decay and other oral diseases.

With this information, we hope that your cavity conundrum has been clarified. There is no silver bullet that prevents tooth decay for everyone. To prevent cavities, it's important to approach your oral health in ways that include, but also go beyond, daily oral care and your biannual visits to the dentist. Keep up these good habits, and adopt some others that could keep your grin glowing.

Taking Your Bad Breath Away

Many of us are so busy we can barely catch our breath. But for the millions of Americans who suffer from chronic halitosis, or bad breath, the joys of everyday life can be anything but breathtaking.

It's estimated that 25% of the population suffers from chronic halitosis, which can be a very embarrassing problem and can seriously affect one's business and social life. If you don't brush and floss daily, particles of food remain in the mouth and collect bacteria, which can cause bad breath.

The surface of the tongue is one of the major breeding grounds for bacteria that attack the teeth and gums, causing bad breath.

The easiest way to clean your tongue is simply to brush it when you brush your teeth. Because many bad breath odors stem from the back of the tongue, it's especially important to thoroughly brush that area. And don't forget to brush the sides of your tongue, since plaque can form there, too.

But if you want the ultimate level of tongue hygiene, you can buy a tongue scraper. These scrapers, which are available at most pharmacies, are specifically designed for tongue cleaning. To use a tongue scraper, glide it firmly across the top and sides of your tongue.

Chronic bad breath can be caused by a number of things. So before you start spending money on products that may not work on a long-term basis, it's really important that a dentist diagnose the source of the problem first.

Medical Disorder

Bad breath may be the sign of a medical disorder, such as: a local infection in the respiratory tract (nose, throat, windpipe, lungs); chronic sinusitis; postnasal drip; chronic bronchitis; diabetes; gastrointestinal disturbance; or a liver or kidney ailment. Therefore, if your dentist determines that your mouth is healthy, you may be referred to your family doctor or a specialist to determine the cause of bad breath.

Medications and Foods

Taking certain medications may play a role in mouth odor. In addition, certain foods, such as onions and garlic, can be absorbed into the bloodstream and then move into the lungs, where they are expelled, causing bad breath. Keeping a log of foods eaten and medications taken will help your dentist make a determination regarding what to recommend for the problem.

Tobacco Products

Not only does tobacco cause bad breath, stain teeth, reduce one's ability to taste foods, and irritate gum tissues, but tobacco users are more likely to suffer from periodontal disease and at greater risk for developing oral cancer. If you use tobacco, ask your dentist for tips on kicking the habit.



Dry Mouth

Saliva is essential for cleaning the mouth and removing particles that may cause odor. Dry mouth can be caused by dehydration, some medications, or the bad habit of constantly breathing through the mouth. To help, a dentist may suggest using sugarless candy or a special mouthrinse, or to increase fluid intake.

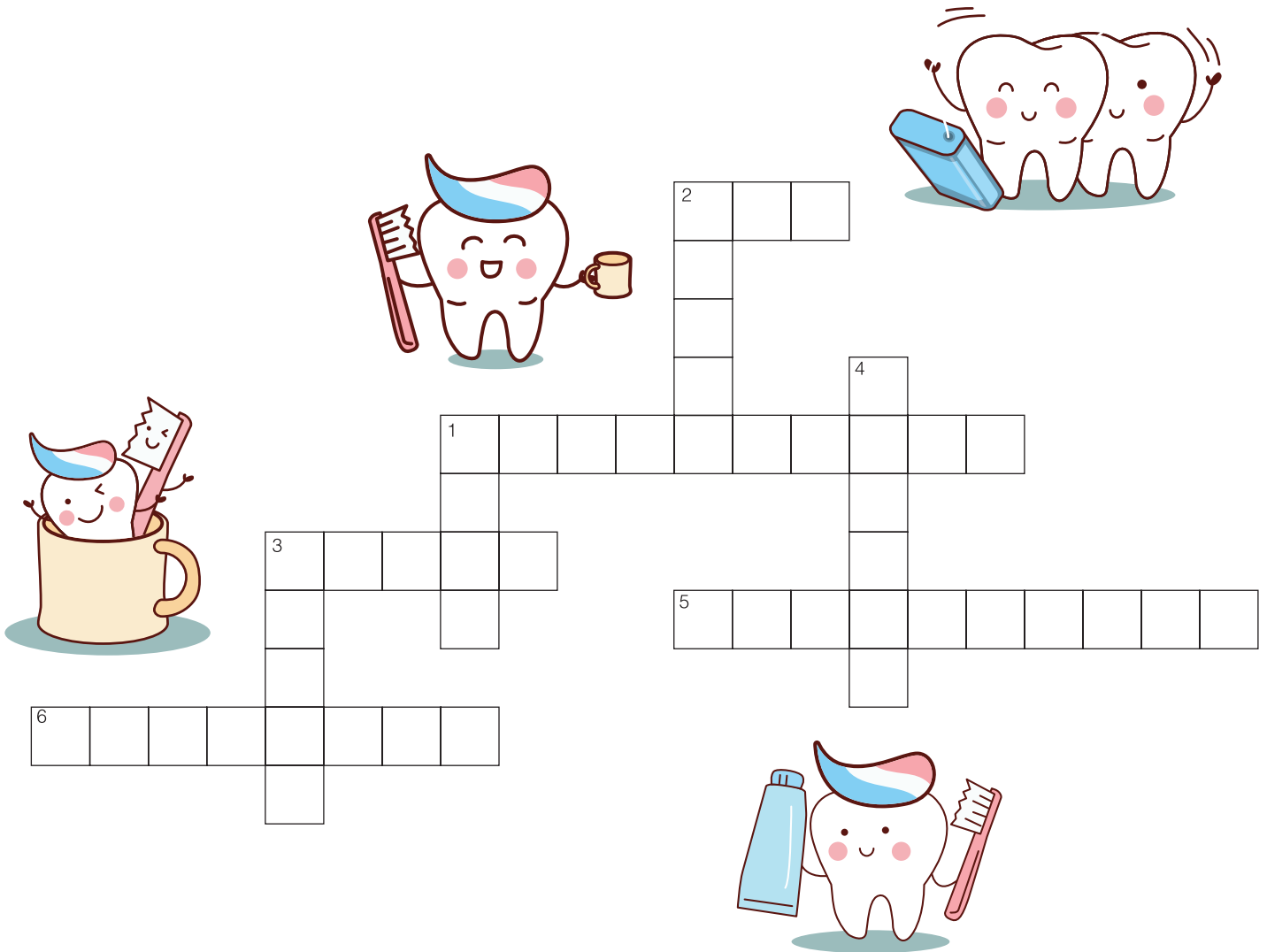
Periodontal (Gum) Disease

It's also important to remember that bad breath may be a sign of something more serious, such as periodontal (or gum) disease. If gum disease is diagnosed, a general dentist may refer you to a periodontist, a specialist in gum disease. One of the warning signs of periodontal disease is persistent bad breath. Gum disease can cause gum tissues to pull away from the teeth and form pockets. Bacteria sits inside these pockets, causing odor. The deeper the pocket means more bacteria and more difficulty cleaning it out yourself. At times, only a professional periodontal cleaning can remove extensive bacteria and plaque.

Although many people may be anxious to solve their mouth odor with a quick fix, the Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) cautions consumers about some breath products on the market. Over-the-counter mouthwashes and breath mints are fine if you want to get rid of a temporary mouth odor; however, if you frequently have to use a mouthwash or mint to cover up breath problems, your dentist may suggest a special antimicrobial mouthwash, which has been shown to reduce plaque and gum disease, while featuring breath-freshening properties. Instead of just temporarily solving breath odor, these products actually kill the germs that cause halitosis.

The MDS suggests that maintaining good oral health is necessary to avoid many dental problems, including bad breath, before they occur. For more information on bad breath and your oral health, visit massdental.org.

Oral Health Crossword Puzzle



Across

1. Something that should always be worn when playing contact sports.
2. The number of times you should visit the dentist each year for a check up.
3. A Bright Future Begins with a Healthy _____.
5. A kind of paste or gel that helps remove plaque from your teeth and gums?
6. Something a dentist puts on your teeth that "seals out" food and plaque to protect you from cavities.

Down

1. A dairy product that you drink and is good for your teeth.
2. Children have 20 primary _____.
3. S_____ can be harmful to your teeth when bacteria in your mouth eat it and produce acid.
4. If you don't brush and floss, you might get a _____.

Answers
Across: 1. Mouthguard 2. Two 3. Smile 4. Cavity
Down: 1. Milk 2. Teeth 3. Sugar 4. Cavity 5. Sealants 6. Sealants

A “Pain” in the Mouth: Mouth Sores

They are annoying, painful, and embarrassing, and can interfere with smiling, eating, and speaking. They affect millions of people every year and are caused by a number of different factors. While some mouth sores are more of a nuisance than anything else, others can be especially harmful to your oral health and overall health. Avoid being down in the mouth by educating yourself about oral lesions: what causes them, how they can be treated, and what you can do to prevent them. Here are the three most common oral lesions.



CANKER SORES

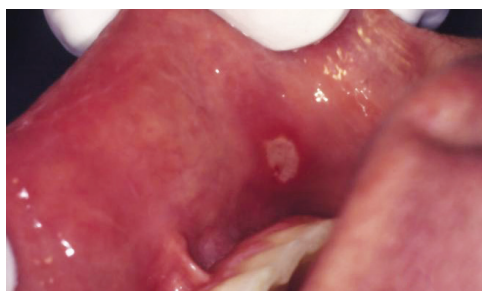
- Are not contagious
- Most commonly appear on the inside of the mouth
- Can show up as one or multiple sores in your mouth at the same time
- Often return
- Have no known cause, but stress, trauma, food allergies, eating certain foods (such as chocolate, nuts, and citrus fruits), and vitamin deficiencies may be a trigger
- Can be relieved by over-the-counter antibacterial mouthwashes, pain-relieving gels, and saltwater rinses. Consult your dentist if you aren't sure which remedy to use.
- Heal within two weeks—but if yours lasts longer than that, contact your dentist

ORAL CANCER

- Often starts as a tiny, unnoticed white or red spot or sore anywhere in the mouth
- Other signs include: a sore that bleeds easily or does not heal; a lump or thickening in your mouth or neck; pain, tenderness, or numbness anywhere in your mouth or lips; and difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking, or moving the jaw or tongue
- More than 30,000 people are diagnosed with oral cancer each year
- Oral cancer most often occurs in people who use alcohol and/or any form of tobacco
- Regular dental checkups that include an oral cancer screening are essential in early detection
- A biopsy is the only way to definitively diagnose oral cancer
- Take an active role in preventing oral cancer by quitting tobacco use, by drinking alcohol in moderation, and by limiting your exposure to the sun

ORAL HERPES

- Most commonly known as cold sores
- An infection caused by the herpes simplex virus
- Begins as small, usually painful, blisters on the lips or inside the mouth
- Is extremely contagious
- May occur through contact with infected razors, towels, drinking glasses, utensils, and other shared items
- Also spreads through contact, such as kissing or oral sex
- Direct contact for even a short amount of time is enough to spread the virus
- Cannot be cured—once you have herpes, you always will. Even when you don't have any symptoms, the virus is always in your body and can flare up at any time.
- Your health care provider can prescribe medications that can quicken healing and make symptoms less painful, but not prevent future outbreaks



Canker sore and oral cancer photos courtesy of David Reznik, DDS, director of the Oral Health Center of the Infectious Disease Program of Grady Health System in Atlanta



Soda Consumption in the United States

38.6 gallons
Amount of soda consumed per American in 2013

8.9 billion
cases of soft drinks sold in 2013

48% of Americans drink at least 1 glass of soda a day

Out of 100 U.S. cities, Boston ranked **#93** in soda consumption



Sugar Content in Beverages



Canning Tooth Decay

Recommended Sugar Consumption for Children and Young Adults

The American Heart Association recommends that kids ages 2 to 18 should consume less than 25 grams—or 6 teaspoons—of added sugars daily.

Finding the Hidden Sugar

If any of these added sweeteners are listed as an ingredient in your drink, you may want to opt for water instead: • brown sugar • cane crystals • cane sugar • honey • corn sweetener • dextrin • maple syrup • molasses • malt syrup • evaporated cane juice • fruit juice concentrate • high fructose corn syrup • And ingredients ending with the letters "ose" (e.g., fructose, lactose, sucrose, maltose, and dextrose)



Is Fluoride Safe?

YES.

Studies conducted for more than 65 years have consistently shown that fluoride is safe and very effective at preventing tooth decay in both adults and children. The American Dental Association, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, among dozens of other groups, all support the benefits of fluoride in reducing tooth decay.



Other Ways to Keep Your Mouth Healthy



LIMIT sugary snacks and drinks, such as candy and soda



CHOOSE WATER (especially fluoridated water) or milk instead of sugary drinks



FLOSS daily



Visit your **DENTIST** regularly



Learn more about the oral health benefits of fluoride at

massdental.org/fluoride