

Not Smiling Yet Over Your New Year's Resolution?

Oral health gives one more reason to commit to a healthier lifestyle in 2009

We've all heard how a lifestyle that includes good eating and regular exercise can fight disease, slow the aging process, boost your mood, and help keep you at an optimal weight. But did you know that sticking to that New Year's resolution can also help ward off tooth decay, gum disease, and unexpected visits to the dentist?

"The mouth and the rest of the body are so interconnected," said Dr. Shannon Mills, DDS, Northeast Delta Dental's Vice President of Professional Relations. "What's good for one is good for the other."

Researchers found that people who had good eating habits, engaged in regular exercise, and maintained a normal weight were 40 percent less likely to develop periodontitis – the most severe form of gum disease – than those who maintained none of these behaviors. Gum disease at any stage can lead to serious oral health problems, including painful inflammation and tooth loss.

When it comes to healthy eating, there are obvious oral health benefits to watching your sugar intake. Limiting sweets and sugary beverages and replacing starchy carbohydrates with healthy, whole grains work to "starve" the bacteria in your mouth. This makes it more difficult for those bacteria to produce acids that attack tooth enamel and can eventually lead to decay.

The minerals and vitamins found in many healthy foods can also support oral health. The calcium



found in dairy products and green, leafy vegetables helps strengthen jawbones and teeth. Antioxidants in fruits, vegetables, legumes and nuts can protect teeth and gums by strengthening immunity and fighting inflammation. Scientists are also researching the oral health benefits of specific foods. Fresh cranberries, for example, have been found to interrupt the bonding of oral bacteria before they can form damaging plaque on teeth.

Exercise and maintaining a healthy weight also play an important role in overall and oral health. Exercise increases circulation, strengthens muscles and bones, and boosts immunity. It can prevent some diseases and helps manage others. Diabetes, for example, is a disease that can be both prevented and managed with the help of exercise. It's also a disease that can affect oral health.

"Exercise, healthy eating, and weight control clearly have significant effects on overall and oral health," said Dr. Mills. "Adding these to a regimen of daily flossing, brushing after meals, and regular dental visits will go a long way toward supporting oral health for people of all ages."

Northeast Delta Dental

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