

## Are You Looking After Your Oral Health During Lockdown?

As we face into another extended period of lockdown, it can sometimes be difficult to motivate ourselves to do the ordinary everyday things. New Year's resolutions like 3km walks may have taken a back seat to TV/Netflix bingeing, and extra snacking!

As daily routines have changed, with many of us not travelling out to work, but working from home, we could be skipping what we see as the small things, that effect our overall health and wellbeing, like our oral hygiene. Are you still brushing your teeth twice a day? Are you forgetting to brush them in the morning because you are not leaving your home? Maybe you are not as concerned about fresh breath? Do you think that brushing them once a day is enough?

The reality is that good oral hygiene is extremely important.

*You might ask yourself, what is good oral hygiene, and why is it important for me?*

Good oral hygiene is about looking after your oral health and keeping your mouth, teeth, and gums clean and healthy. Strengthening this habit can help prevent oral diseases such as tooth decay, infection, gum disease and mouth cancer. Brushing your teeth twice a day, - at bedtime and one other time, with a fluoride toothpaste (at least 1000ppm fluoride) – flossing every day (to reach those hard-to-reach place and to remove plaque along the gumline) and visiting your dentist at least once a year of a check-up, are all part of the process.

Brushing your teeth removes food stuffs and helps prevent the build-up of sticky plaque on your teeth (which causes tooth decay and in more severe cases tooth loss). Using fluoride toothpaste helps to repair damage to your teeth from acid attacks caused by consuming sugary foods and drinks.

A tale as old as time, too much sugar is bad for your oral health, and is the main cause of tooth decay. So, watching what you eat and drink is the first, maybe the hardest step in our oral hygiene. Cutting down on sugar doesn't mean you can't enjoy the sweet things in life! Try first cutting down on sugary snacks between meals. This will reduce the production of acid in your mouth which happens naturally when eating sugary products. Next, try swapping some sugary treats with healthy snacks like a tasty fruit. Over time this substitution will feel like second nature. Do the same with your drinking habits. Try quenching your thirst with water or unflavoured milk over soft or fizzy drinks.

Did you know that a small glass (150ml) of unsweetened 100% fruit juice counts as only 1 of your 5-a-day, and no more than that. It is best taken with a meal because of the sugar and acid. When your changed routine feels settled, another tip to keep on track is reading food labels for sugar content. Less than 5g per 100 g is a low sugar.

The hardest part is always the start, so try the process with a friend or family member so you can encourage each other to keep your gums a healthy pink colour and those pearly whites clean.

Gum disease is a condition that often starts in childhood or adolescence and is often forgotten about in young adults as a health issue to focus on. This can result in serious problems rearing their heads later in life. It is caused by the build-up of dental plaque on the tooth surface and around the gum margins, generally because of poor toothbrushing. It can be identified in the early stages as inflammation of the gum margins with redness, swelling and bleeding on brushing. Severe gum disease can cause you to lose your teeth.

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*What can I do to prevent this happening?*

The answer is of course, toothbrushing twice daily with a fluoride toothpaste, which is an important plaque control method. Some tricks are to brush your teeth to music so you can make sure you are at the sink for at least two minutes, giving your gums and teeth a good clean. Consistency is key here! Once you build up the habit, it'll be harder to break, so keep brushing, keep smiling.

Getting the whole family aware of good oral hygiene and by teaching young children about it can help to ensure that they know what to do to keep their teeth strong and healthy!

And remember to always keep dental appointments. Visit your dentist regularly, even if you wear dentures or have no teeth.

Remember, it's all about taking care, one step at a time, even though the tough times.

*Self-Care Self-Aware, Healthy Teeth for Life!*

For more information, please see our website [www.dentalhealth.ie](http://www.dentalhealth.ie)