

Prevention is the key to keeping your teeth healthy and your smile beautiful for a life time.

### Why Brush?

Brushing your teeth after meals and between-meal snacks not only gets rid of food particles, it removes plaque, the sticky film that forms on teeth. Plaque is made up of bacteria that produce acids that cause tooth decay and gum disease, so thorough removal of plaque is the main goal of brushing. Using a fluoride toothpaste is also important because the fluoride reduces bacteria levels, as well as remineralizes tooth surfaces, making them stronger.

Your CDA member dentist or dental hygienist can instruct you on the proper method for brushing and recommend the best toothbrush for you. Generally, a brush with soft, end-rounded or polished bristles is less likely to injure gum tissue or damage the tooth surface. The size, shape and angle of the brush should allow you to reach every tooth. Children need smaller brushes than those designed for adults. Remember: worn-out toothbrushes can not properly clean your teeth and may injure your gums. Toothbrushes should be replaced every few months or when the bristles show signs of wear.

### Why Floss?

To prevent tooth decay and gum disease, plaque must be thoroughly removed from all tooth surfaces. Unfortunately, your brush can't reach effectively between your teeth and under the gumline. Because tooth decay and periodontal disease often start in these areas, it is as important to floss on a daily basis as it is to brush.

Flossing is a skill that needs to be learned. Do not be discouraged if you find it difficult at first. Your CDA member dentist or dental hygienist can help you learn to floss properly and give you tips on how to make it easier. With practice, you will find that flossing takes only a few minutes of your time each day.

There are also other types of interdental cleaners, such as thin spiral brushes or wedge-shaped wooden sticks that can be used to help keep your gums and the spaces between your teeth clean and healthy. Your dentist or dental hygienist can help you choose, and instruct you on the proper use of the oral health aides that are best for you.

### What About Mouthwashes, Toothpastes And Other Oral Care Products?

There are a variety of products available to help support your oral health. Mouthrinses, gels and toothpastes with fluoride can be used to help prevent decay. Some mouthwashes and toothpastes contain ingredients with antibacterial properties and can help prevent or control gingivitis (gum inflammation). Others contain ingredients to reduce the formation of tartar, the hardened plaque that forms on teeth over time. Gum and mints containing xylitol, a natural sweetener that reduces decay causing bacteria, can be used as part of an overall strategy to help reduce cavities.

If you are already using an over-the-counter product for your oral health, it is always a good idea to consult with your CDA member dentist on its appropriateness for you. Depending on your individual situation, your CDA member dentist may recommend use of a specific product.

### Are Regular Checkups Really That Important?

Yes! When your CDA member dentist looks in your mouth, he or she is not only looking for the signs of tooth decay and gum disease, but also for signs of systemic diseases – as your mouth is often a good indicator of your overall health. Conditions such as precancerous or cancerous lesions, diabetes, blocked salivary glands, and even HIV or AIDS can often be detected in an oral exam. Additionally, there is growing evidence of links between periodontal disease (gum disease) and heart disease, some respiratory diseases and low-birth weight babies. To maintain your general health, it is important to maintain your oral health!

Beyond the connection to your general health, regular dental care is essential to preventing more complicated dental problems from developing. Good oral hygiene practices, that includes daily brushing and flossing, eating a healthy diet and visiting your CDA member dentist for a check-up twice a year – or as often as your CDA member dentist recommends – is the best way to keep your teeth healthy and your smile beautiful for a lifetime!