



# Aetna Dental® plans

A healthier body starts with good dental health

## Your mouth matters — more than you may know

A nice smile can brighten your appearance. But good dental health also helps keep your mouth in better shape. That means fewer cavities, stronger teeth and less chance of gum disease.

Research shows that caring for your teeth and gums may be important to your overall health. What goes on in your mouth can affect the rest of your body. At the same time, what goes on in your body can affect your mouth.

## The mouth-body connection

There's a proven relationship between oral and general health. Many health conditions may increase the risk of oral diseases. And poor oral health can negatively affect many general health conditions and the management of those conditions.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes, the first signs of general health problems show up in the mouth. And a dental professional can spot signs of many of them.<sup>2</sup>



**Tooth tip:** Schedule regular oral exams with your dentist.

## Sticking to a dental exam schedule can help spot:

- Infections
- Immune disorders
- Injuries
- Osteoporosis
- Eating disorders
- Malnutrition
- Some cancers

## With good dental care, you can:



Cut your risk of heart disease



Lower your risk of a stroke



Help reduce complications of rheumatoid arthritis



Lower the chance of early delivery during pregnancy



Help control your blood sugar

<sup>1</sup><https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/oral-health/>

<sup>2</sup><https://health.osu.edu/health/dental-health/health-issues-a-dentist-can-identify>

# A healthier mouth can help you have a healthier life

**With certain common dental conditions, there could be other issues, too. Your dentist can help spot:**

## **Gum disease**

This is an infection of the tissues that hold the teeth in place. It usually begins when bacteria that aren't properly removed during brushing and flossing inflame the gums.

If left untreated, it can become a serious infection and destroy your gums and tissues surrounding the teeth. And in some cases, it can cause other health problems or complicate diseases in other parts of the body.

## **Diabetes**

With diabetes, you're more likely to develop mouth and gum conditions than people without diabetes.<sup>3</sup> So treating the gums can help make it easier to control.<sup>4</sup>

## **Heart disease**

This is the leading cause of death for Americans. And people with gum infections may be more likely to have heart attacks or strokes.

Seeing your dentist regularly might be one of the best ways to fight these illnesses.

## **Oral cancer**

Regular checkups also help find signs of oral cancer early on. If you or your dentist find a warning sign, you may need a more complete exam. Your dentist can suggest and explain how to do a monthly self-exam.

## **The oral health, mental health and substance abuse connection**

Having a mental health or substance abuse challenge can negatively affect oral health. That's why it's important to work with your dentist to address problems like:

- Bruxism (teeth grinding)
- Dry mouth (from medication or substance abuse)
- Tooth erosion (from an eating disorder like bulimia)
- Tooth decay and mouth sores

So check in with your dentist often. They can give you information and tips to help you stay healthy.

### **Take extra care during pregnancy**

Pregnancy causes changes to the body — and sometimes in the mouth. These can affect your overall health and the health of your baby.

Here are just a few things your dentist will look for during an exam:

**Pregnancy gingivitis:** Hormones can make your gums red, swollen or bleed.

**Serious gum disease:** Gum infections may produce a chemical in the body that may cause early labor.

**Tooth enamel wear:** Stomach acids from morning sickness can wear down your tooth enamel.

So it's important to visit your dentist throughout your pregnancy. They can provide the treatment and guidance needed to help keep you and your baby healthy.

## **It's easy to stay in the know**

We'll give you articles and tips to help take care of you and your family's oral health.

Just visit our dental health library at [go.aetna.com/oralhealth](https://go.aetna.com/oralhealth)

<sup>3</sup>American Academy of Periodontology. Diabetes and periodontal disease. Available at: [Perio.org/Consumer/Gum-Disease-and-Diabetes.htm](https://www.perio.org/Consumer/Gum-Disease-and-Diabetes.htm). Accessed October 2019.

<sup>4</sup>BMC Oral Health. The effect of periodontal therapy on glycemic control and fasting plasma glucose level in type 2 diabetic patients: systematic review and meta-analysis. 2016. Available at: [BMCOralhealth.Biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12903-016-0249-1/open-peer-review](https://www.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12903-016-0249-1/open-peer-review). Accessed October 2019.

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