

HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter
www.clt.astate.edu/wellness



Oral Health

Oral Cavity

The oral cavity is the hollow opening on the face that includes teeth, tongue, jawbone, gums, and other tissues. This opening is also referred to as the mouth and is constantly introduced to foreign organisms. From pen tops, sweet treats, and maybe a kiss from Spot the dog, germs and bacteria find their way into the oral cavity where they have the potential to cause health problems.

Oral health is more than just a pretty smile. The mouth and all of its contents must be in good health to prevent disease as well as minor complications. Potential oral health conditions may include but are not limited to the following: cavities, gum disease, dry mouth, halitosis, and oral cancer.

Teeth and Gums

Our teeth and gums are important because they assist with mastication and speaking. If good dental hygiene isn't practiced, tooth decay and/or gum disease may occur. Tooth decay occurs when bacteria in the mouth feeds off sugar found in food and produces acid. This harmful acid breaks down the outer layer of the tooth (enamel) generating a cavity. If a cavity (dental caries) is left untreated tooth loss can result.

Bacteria in the oral cavity can too cause periodontal (gum) disease. Periodontal disease occurs when microorganisms travel beneath the gum tissue causing an infection. The infection weakens supporting bone and causes the gum tissue to move away from teeth. Without support from the gum tissue, teeth can become mobile and may cause difficulty chewing. Dental cavities and periodontal disease are the most common oral diseases according to the World Health Organization. You can protect yourself against these health disparities by

- Properly brushing and flossing regularly
- Keeping small levels of fluoride in the oral cavity
- Decrease sugar consumption
- Making the dentist a part of your healthcare team

Dry Mouth

Dry mouth is experienced when there is a lack of saliva. The difference between occasional dry mouth and xerostomia is that patients experiencing xerostomia have dry mouth frequently. Xerostomia could be a salivary gland disorder, a symptom of an underlying pathology, or simply a side-effect of medication.

Saliva is very important to the oral cavity. It helps remove waste and provides protection against microorganisms. This liquid substance contains minerals that help protect the enamel against dental caries. When the flow of saliva is decreased, this protection mechanism is affected. Oral health will begin to decline. An individual with xerostomia may experience difficulty chewing, swallowing, and speaking. The following are ways to treat xerostomia:

- ✓ Chew sugar free gum. Saliva flow is stimulated by chewing as a result of the activated muscles compressing the salivary glands.
- ✓ Purchase tissue lubricants. Artificial saliva is a commercial product that lubricates the mouth and throat relieving irritation caused by xerostomia.
- ✓ Consult with your physician.

Halitosis

Halitosis is an embarrassing condition, yet so many Americans suffer from it. Bad Breath, as halitosis is commonly referred to, escapes the facial orifice of nearly 40,000,000 Americans. This curable condition can be caused by food, poor dental hygiene, dry mouth,

illnesses, or tobacco use. Including certain foods in your diet like onion, garlic, and spices may be good on the stomach, but deadly to the nose. The oral conditions aforementioned can also be the source of bad breath.

Plaque buildup signals bacteria lingering in the oral cavity. If plaque is accompanied with dry mouth there is a great chance that dental caries are present as well, resulting in halitosis. Illness can also contribute to malodor. Chemicals produced by health conditions such as diabetes, liver failure, and stomach disorders may produce an unpleasant odor. Bad breath can be hard to self-detect, but here are a few tips that may keep you from singeing nose hairs during conversations:

- ✓ Chew sugar free gum. Bad breath can be caused by dry mouth. Saliva is important for cleansing.
- ✓ No toothbrush? Rinse with water. It would be nice if we could brush after every meal. However, if you're caught without a toothbrush, rinsing your mouth with water could help remove loose food particles. In certain areas, water contains low levels of fluoride which assists with teeth and gum protection.
- ✓ Eat apples, celery, or carrots. Similar to gum, these snacks help remove remains from the oral cavity.
- ✓ Don't forget your tongue. Along with brushing your teeth, removing plaque from the tongue can contribute to fresh breath.

Oral Cancer

Oral Cancer can affect different parts of the mouth and/or throat. People using tobacco, infected with HPV, and men over the age of 40 are

at a greater risk of developing oral cancer. Lip cancer can also be associated with oral cancer; however, lip cancer is acquired from overexposure to the sun's harmful rays. Early detection, just like any other health condition, is important and determines the method of treatment. The following signs and symptoms can be associated with oral cancer:

- Small white or red sore in the mouth
- Trouble with swallowing or chewing
- A sore that does not heal
- A chronic sore throat
- Unusual bleeding, tenderness, pain, or numbness on lips or in oral cavity
- Lumps on the lips or in the mouth

The sooner oral cancer is detected, the quicker treatment can begin. If the tumor is small, a surgical procedure could remove the tumor. If the lesion is too large, surgery may be accompanied by radiation therapy and chemotherapy. It's good to know that there are interventions for oral cancer, but prevention is better. Listed are a few lifestyle modifications that will reduce your risk of developing oral cancer:

- Stop tobacco use
- Increase consumption of fruits and vegetables
- Decrease alcohol intake
- Use lip balm that includes sunscreen
- Make an appointment to see your oral health provider whether you have teeth or not

Arkansas Department of Health

If you have any question about dental care and resources, you can visit the Arkansas Department of Health website

www.healthy.arkansas.gov. On the website, information is posted about resources for children and individuals over 21 who cannot afford dental care. The Donated Dental Services functions to benefit those that are medically-compromised. The Community Health Centers of Arkansas provides information about the federally-funded community health centers in your area.

Donated Dental Services (DDS)

501-221-3033

Community Health Centers of Arkansas

501-374-8225

Sources for this article includes:

- 1.) <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002030/>
- 2.) <http://www.ada.org/3005.aspx?currentTab=1>
- 3.) <http://www.adha.org/downloads/factsheets/oralcancer.pdf>
- 4.) <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/AAG/doh.htm>
- 5.) <http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/tc/tooth-decay-topic-overview>
- 6.) <http://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/factsheet/oral-health.cfm>
- 7.) <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/Topics/DryMouth/DryMouth.htm>
- 8.) <http://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programsServices/oralhealth/Pages/FAQs.aspx>
- 9.) <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/187640.php>
- 10.) <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs318/en/index.html>

**If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at hanrahan@astate.edu.

The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or hanrahan@astate.edu. Produced by Jerrica Thomas, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.