

5 Things Members Should Know About Dental Care



We're committed to helping our members take care of their oral health.

Most employers who offer Tufts Health Plan also offer their employees dental insurance through our partner Delta Dental. But whether our plan members opt in to dental insurance or not, we're still committed to helping them take care of their oral health.

Everyone knows they should brush and floss daily and get regular cleanings. But here are a few more important dental health facts that our members and their employers should know:

1. Dental health is whole body health.

In recent years, it's become increasingly clear that there's a connection between teeth and gums and the rest of body:

- Research has shown a link between periodontal (gum) disease and the development of diabetes, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease.¹
- According to the American Academy of Periodontology, people with gum disease are nearly twice as likely to have heart disease.²
- New research has also suggested the possibility of a link between gum disease and Alzheimer's disease.

In fact, according to Delta Dental, dentists can potentially identify signs in the mouth of up to 120 systemic illnesses. They can also provide important recommendations about how to prevent future issues. It's why regular dental check-ups are so critical.

¹<https://www.statnews.com/2017/07/17/dentistry-medicine-division/>

²<https://www.deltadental.com/grinmag/us/en/ddpa/2019/summer/wellness/window-into-overall-health.html>

2. Kids' dental health is about more than just preventing cavities.

Many people think, logically enough, that it doesn't make sense to bring their children to the dentist until most or all of their baby teeth have come in. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that parents take their baby to a dentist by age one or within 6 months of the first baby tooth appearing. At that point, a pediatric dentist can not only provide helpful guidance about dental health and hygiene, but can also identify and recommend ways to plan for potential speech or orthodontic issues down the road. There may be some financial benefits for parents who take their kids to the dentist early, too: A study in Pediatrics showed that children who have their first dental visit before age one have 40% lower dental costs in their first five years than children who don't.

When children are older, their dentist can play an important role in helping to protect them from oral cancer. 70 to 80% of oral and oropharyngeal cancers are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV) virus. The American Dental Association (ADA) recently adopted a policy urging dentists to support the use of the HPV vaccine which is recommended for boys and girls at age 11-12.

3. Dental care is especially important for pregnant women.

Many women mistakenly believe that it's not safe to visit the dentist during pregnancy. But while it's true that certain dental procedures, such as oral surgery requiring full anesthesia, may not be appropriate for pregnant women, routine dental care visits and many dental procedures are perfectly safe for pregnant women. In fact, they're highly recommended. As a result of hormonal fluctuations, changes in diet, and other factors, pregnant women are at increased risk of dental problems including gingivitis, tooth decay and gum disease.

Gum disease is particularly dangerous for pregnant women, as it has been linked with pre-term and low-birth-weight babies. So, if there's any time to make oral health a priority, it's during pregnancy.



4. There's a reason your dentist wants to know what medications you're taking.

They're not just being nosy. Many over-the-counter and prescription medications can have an impact on teeth and gums or may require special precautions during dental procedures. For example, anticoagulants like warfarin or heparin, which are commonly used to prevent stroke and heart disease, can also cause bleeding problems during oral surgery or periodontal disease treatment. Some anti-seizure or immunosuppressant drugs can cause enlarged gum tissue, which may require extra care and cleaning. Other medications, from over-the-counter cold medicine to antidepressants to oral contraceptives, can cause side effects including dry mouth, oral ulcers or fungal infections.

Whatever the case may be, a dentist can recommend remedies, preventive measures and special care to help ensure that medications don't lead to oral health complications.

5. There are options besides dental insurance for lowering dental expenses.

Dental insurance may not be an option for everyone, but there are other ways people can save money on their dental health. Some dentists offer discounted rates for patients without dental insurance if they pay their bill in full at the time of their visit. Others may offer payment plans or sliding scale rates. Another option is to use a health savings account (HSA), like the ones Tufts Health Plans offers with high deductible plans, to save for dental expenses with pre-tax dollars. HSA funds can be used to pay for any service designed to prevent or treat dental disease including cleanings, fillings, crowns, extractions, dentures, sealants, X-rays.

At Tufts Health Plan, we believe that supporting our members' health is about more than just medical care.

It's about looking at all of the factors that contribute to wellness, including oral health.