



# Moms-to-be

## *Watch your vitamin D*

Can a pregnant woman's vitamin D level affect the health of her unborn child's teeth? That's the question a recent study of more than 100 pregnant women sought to answer.

The study checked the women's vitamin D levels during their second trimester of pregnancy. Results showed that only about 10 percent were ingesting enough vitamin D. Use of prenatal vitamins and drinking milk were the main sources of this vital nutrient.

Researchers later examined the women's children for enamel defects and tooth decay. Children who exhibited either of these problems were more likely to be borne by mothers with significantly low levels of vitamin D.

Vitamin D has long been known to be an essential component in the development of strong bones and teeth. However, until now, no study has

linked the child's teeth to his or her mother's vitamin D consumption. Pregnant women should be sure to eat balanced diets and ask their doctors about the need for prenatal vitamins where indicated.



## How dentally fit are we?

America has made great strides in improving our dental health over the last several decades. Over 90 percent of us brush our teeth before heading off to bed each night, and more than 80 percent brush every morning. More of us are flossing as well, with 55 percent of those doing so on a daily basis.

However, in some areas, we still have goals to meet. About half of our youth still develop cavities in their permanent teeth before reaching their 17th birthday. Half of us don't receive regular professional dental care, and, worst of all, periodontal disease runs rampant, affecting three-quarters of us.

The good news is that we seem to be ahead of the United Kingdom, where about half the population have teeth that show the effects of poor diets and less-than-stellar oral-health habits.

Unfortunately, many of the bad habits affecting teeth in the U.K. are the same ones in which Americans tend to indulge. Drinking sweetened coffee, smoking, and downing colas, flavored waters, juices, and other beverages high in acids are having marked effects across the pond, just as they are in the United States.

The good news is that we are becoming more dentally fit. The percentage of children who have never experienced tooth decay has increased since the early '90s, and more older Americans are keeping their teeth. Although we have far to go, we are headed in the right direction. Good daily home care, regular professional cleanings and oral-health exams, and adjusting diet and other oral habits can all have a positive effect on our dental health and help us to become more dentally fit.



## Healthy mouth ... healthy you!

For years, the health of the body and the health of the teeth have been viewed as separate entities—one having no effect on the other. Recently, however, research that has shown relationships between the two has begun to change this line of thinking.

Diseases, specifically diabetes and heart disease, may be more likely to occur in those suffering from poor dental health. Likewise, mouth ailments such as gum disease may indicate the presence of some diseases. Specifics of the association between dental health and overall health are not yet completely clear, but the connection is being researched.

There's no question that, for many, dental health is improving. More people are taking advantage of preventive oral care and practicing better home-care techniques. As a result, people are enjoying better dental health and keeping their teeth longer. Maybe that will translate into better overall health as well.

# GOOD NUTRITION IS GOOD FOR YOUR TEETH

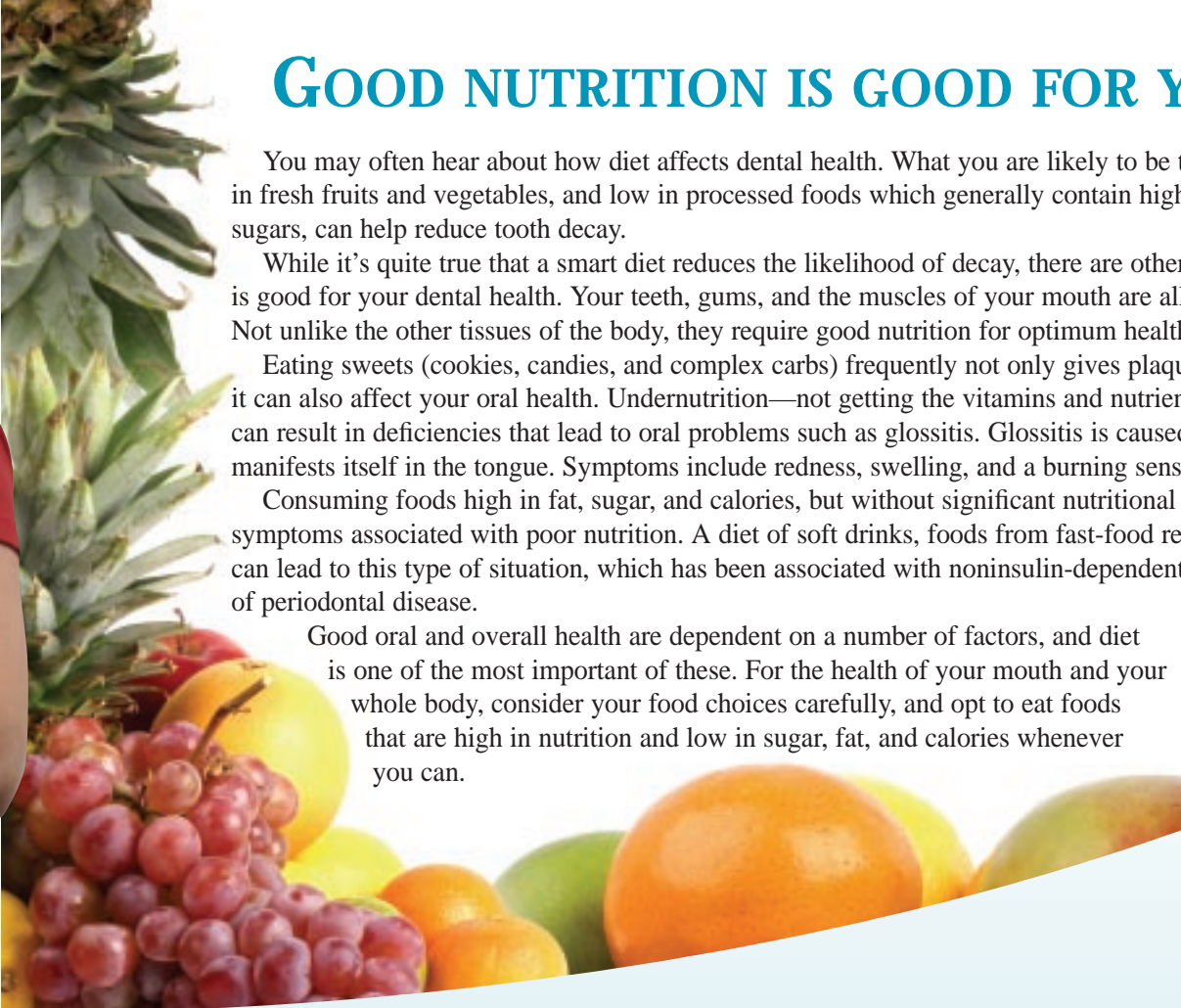
You may often hear about how diet affects dental health. What you are likely to be told is how a balanced diet high in fresh fruits and vegetables, and low in processed foods which generally contain high levels of carbohydrates and sugars, can help reduce tooth decay.

While it's quite true that a smart diet reduces the likelihood of decay, there are other reasons that a healthy diet is good for your dental health. Your teeth, gums, and the muscles of your mouth are all made up of living tissues. Not unlike the other tissues of the body, they require good nutrition for optimum health.

Eating sweets (cookies, candies, and complex carbs) frequently not only gives plaque a foothold in your mouth, it can also affect your oral health. Undernutrition—not getting the vitamins and nutrients you need from your diet—can result in deficiencies that lead to oral problems such as glossitis. Glossitis is caused by a vitamin B deficiency and manifests itself in the tongue. Symptoms include redness, swelling, and a burning sensation.

Consuming foods high in fat, sugar, and calories, but without significant nutritional value, can result in obesity and symptoms associated with poor nutrition. A diet of soft drinks, foods from fast-food restaurants, and prepackaged foods can lead to this type of situation, which has been associated with noninsulin-dependent diabetes and an increased risk of periodontal disease.

Good oral and overall health are dependent on a number of factors, and diet is one of the most important of these. For the health of your mouth and your whole body, consider your food choices carefully, and opt to eat foods that are high in nutrition and low in sugar, fat, and calories whenever you can.



## To tell the tooth

As with all our body parts, our teeth have a life cycle. Although they are not apparent in our mouths at birth, they begin to form during the first month or so of development in the womb. By the time a child is born, the front teeth are fully formed within the gums and just waiting to erupt.

That eruption may occur as early as three months, but it might not occur until four months or later. Each of the 20 tooth buds that form in the gums before birth has its own specific form and purpose. When all the teeth work together, they become the perfect force with which to bite, tear, chew, grind, and devour food.

Tooth color varies from person to person, just as eye color does. This is true of baby teeth as well as adult teeth. Shades can range from bright white to ivory to yellowish. The color is determined genetically and often is similar to that of one of the parents, although that may not be readily apparent because of stains to the parent's teeth.

Baby teeth aren't permanent, but they do play an important role in tooth development. Baby teeth are just the right size for the growing child's mouth. They serve to help him or her digest food until the mouth is big enough to accommodate the adult teeth. They also hold spaces for adult teeth to help them come in straight.

The adult molars arrive at the ages of 6, 12, and between the ages of 17 and 21 for wisdom teeth that erupt. The molars are important because they are used to grind food. First and second molars usually pose no problems coming in, but third molars, or wisdom teeth, are often impacted and may need to be surgically removed.

Periodontal disease is one of the worst enemies of adult teeth. It affects the pockets between the gums and the teeth, causing the teeth to loosen.

As teeth age, they are more likely to exhibit cavities in the dentin, which may be exposed by a lifetime of chewing. Because dentin isn't as strong as enamel, it is more prone to cavities.

Fortunately, good dental care can help to keep teeth healthy throughout life. So, to keep smiling from the time those first tiny teeth appear, talk to us. We can recommend both home and professional care customized to your needs, no matter what your age.



## A smile that's healthy and beautiful

Good dental care, including daily brushing and flossing and regular professional care, can help you to have a healthy smile. But if your teeth are crooked, chipped, or discolored, healthy may not feel like enough to you. Maybe it's time to think about a makeover.

Smile makeovers aren't just for would-be movie stars or reality television celebrities. Every day, more people are opting to remake their smiles using advancements in cosmetic dentistry techniques.

Each smile makeover is different because each set of teeth is unique. However, most makeovers begin with an assessment of the patient's teeth, which may include pictures taken with an intraoral camera or molds of the teeth. Together, the patient and cosmetic dentist will discuss the patient's smile and the specific changes that could be made to achieve a more pleasing result.

From this consultation and examination, the dentist will develop a plan to make over the smile into a look the patient finds more attractive. Among the techniques that may be used to achieve this result are bonding, crowns, onlays, and veneers. Gum recontouring may be required prior to the makeover restoration.

Once the patient elects to undergo the makeover, he or she will be instructed concerning the specifics of the procedure and recovery. There may be some discomfort following the procedure, but this can usually be relieved using over-the-counter pain relievers.

If you're not happy with your smile, don't be intimidated by the word "makeover." A makeover could be in your future, and the results might definitely make you smile.

## Hold the turkey! *CRANBERRIES CAN HELP PREVENT GINGIVITIS*

Turns out the tiny, but tart, cranberry may be a titan when it comes to fighting gingivitis. Certain properties in the cranberry apparently interfere with bacteria trying to cling to the surfaces of teeth.

Gingivitis is the first stage of periodontal disease—a destroyer of underlying bone structure in the mouth and the number-one cause of tooth loss. Symptoms of gingivitis include red and swollen gums that bleed easily during brushing and flossing.

Now before you run out to stock up on cranberry juice, remember that the cocktail contains plenty of sugar to temper the berry's tartness. Unfortunately, that sugar makes most brands of cranberry juice less than desirable for preventing gum disease. Don't despair, however; juices flavored with other fruit juices and cranberry tablets are available.

Check with your doctor before increasing your daily consumption of cranberry juice if you have a history of kidney stones or have been prescribed blood thinners. Only three ounces of juice per day are necessary to reap the beneficial effects.



## DO OVERWEIGHT CHILDREN HAVE FEWER CAVITIES?

Dental researchers recently did a double take when evidence from a study pointed to overweight children having fewer cavities than children of normal weight. The study, which involved close to 18,000 youngsters, was done at a dental center linked to the University of Rochester Medical Center. The results have researchers scratching their heads in surprise.

In spite of the study results, many researchers have suggested that conclusions about them should not be made without further research. A few facts, however, remain clear.

First, the types of foods eaten may affect the likelihood of cavity development as much or more than the quantity of food eaten. Second, good dental hygiene, including good home care, can have a marked effect on dental health. Finally, obesity in children continues to be linked to a variety of health problems. Good nutritional and exercise habits taught in childhood may improve the prospects of a healthier adulthood.

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**SMILE! It's spring!**

