



Toothy tales

“What is your fortune, my pretty maid? My face is my fortune, Sir, she said.” A common refrain taken from a popular nursery rhyme. It says a lot. Because no matter how much a high-flier you may be, your face – which includes your smile – ultimately plays a big part in the global world. Which is why keeping our teeth hale and hearty should be one of our top priorities in life. So says dental surgeon CHENG ENG WAH.

Since your mouth is a vital part of your body, you should be affording as much importance to dental care as you do general health care. Because neglecting your teeth could lead to a string of worse problems.

The key to good oral health is prevention – stopping problems before they arise. Therefore, brushing, flossing and twice-yearly dental check-ups are standard routines for oral health care. But beware, there are many common misconceptions about dental hygiene we should be aware of.

1 The more I brush, the better teeth I will have

On the contrary, overzealous brushing for extended periods of time do more harm than good to the enamel of your teeth, which can lead to tooth sensitivity and other complications in the long term. The recommended time taken for brushing is generally around three minutes twice a day.

Remember, brushing with a hard toothbrush can damage tooth enamel. It can also cause gingival recession, thereby exposing the dentine in the root. This will cause sensitivity and appearance of



“yellowish” teeth because of the exposed “yellowish” dentine; so do use a soft bristled toothbrush with the proper techniques for the best care of your teeth.



you age, your teeth naturally become more yellow because more dentine, which lies beneath enamel, becomes more exposed as part of a normal process of ageing.

2 I only see the dentist when I have pain or problems with my teeth

Just because your teeth look healthy doesn't mean you should skip going to the dentist. Regular dental check-ups are critical for spotting and treating potential dental problems before they become severe, such as oral cancer and periodontal disease.

It is necessary to visit the dentist on a regular basis – at least twice a year for check-ups and dental cleaning to ensure that your teeth stay healthy and that any dental problems you may have are treated in time.

3 The more sugar I eat, the more cavities I will have

It is not the amount of sugar intake, but the amount of times the sugar has contact with the teeth that determines how quickly it can cause tooth decay. When foods, such as slowly-dissolving candies and soda, are in the mouth for a long time, it increases the amount of time your teeth are exposed to the acids formed by oral bacteria from the sugar. Tooth decay occurs when these bacteria feed on the sugar and create an acidic by-product that destroys tooth enamel.

The longer the sugars and acids are in contact with the enamel of your teeth, the more damage they can do. Even seemingly more healthy alternatives like fruit juice or lemonade can have similar effects if consumed regularly – because of their acid content. If you can't brush your teeth after these snacks, it is best to rinse your mouth several times with water.

4 The whiter the colour, the healthier the teeth are

To determine the true health of your teeth, the focus should be on clean teeth, not white teeth. A tooth can look healthy and white, but at the same time, it can have cavities, problems with the root or other abnormalities that require treatment. Also, as

5 Brushing and flossing regularly will prevent me from having bad breath

It is possible to be meticulous about your personal oral hygiene and yet still have bad breath. This is because bad breath (halitosis) can be due to a number of different reasons. They include dry mouth (xerostomia) caused by certain medications or medical conditions, certain foods that you consume, bacterial build-up at the back of your tongue (which you can remove daily by brushing your tongue), as well as certain diseases such as liver disease or respiratory infections.

In order to maintain a healthy mouth and an odourless breath, regular brushing, flossing are the essential steps that should be followed without fail, as they remove plaque, a complex mass of bacteria that constantly forms on your teeth.

6 I shouldn't brush my teeth if my gums are bleeding

Bleeding gums is a sign that they are inflamed and are not healthy. Swollen and inflamed gums are usually caused when dental plaque and food debris is not properly removed by regular brushing and flossing, leading to bacterial infections due to plaque build-up along the gums. Bleeding of the gums could also possibly be a sign of early periodontal disease or gingivitis.

You should thoroughly and gently brush the teeth at least twice a day with a soft toothbrush using proper techniques to help the gums recover and keep them healthy. The initial bleeding seen during brushing will gradually be reduced over a period of time. If the bleeding continues, visit your dentist for consultation, though this can easily be corrected in its early stages. ✕

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