



Nova Scotia Dental Association

210 Waterfront Drive, Suite 101

Bedford, NS B4A 0H3

www.nsdental.org



Tel: 902 420 0088

Fax: 902 420 6537

Email: nsda@eastlink.ca

Your Dentist - Oral Exam

Think all dentists can do is freshen your breath and clean your teeth? Think again.

Maintaining good health is important to all of us - but to be in good overall health, you need to have good oral health as well. Read on to learn more about an Oral Exam or Click on the links below to see other ways your Dentist can help:

During an Oral Exam, the dentist inspects your mouth for a number of things on their checklist to help evaluate the status of your oral health:

- damaged, missing or decayed teeth;
- early signs of cavities;
- condition of your gums, such as periodontal pockets, inflammation or other signs of gum disease (which can lead to tooth and bone loss);
- to see how previous dental work such as root canals, fillings and crowns are holding up;
- early signs of mouth or throat cancer, such as white lesions or blocked salivary glands;
- other suspicious growths or cysts;
- position of your teeth (e.g., spacing, bite);
- an inspection of your neck glands and lymph nodes;
- dental x-rays;
- signs that you clench or grind your teeth (a treatable problem that can cause headache or sore jaw and can, if serious, lead to hearing loss and tooth loss);
- signs of bleeding or inflammation on your tongue and on the roof or floor of your mouth;
- the overall health and function of your temporomandibular joint (which joins the jaw to skull), checking for signs of disorders that can cause pain or tenderness;
- the general condition of the bones in your face, jaw and around your mouth.

A complete Oral Exam fact sheet is available on the Canadian Dental Association [website](#).

Since the mouth is often referred to as the gateway to your body - is it really much of a surprise that potentially serious conditions show signs in your mouth without you even knowing?

In addition to preventive and restorative oral health care, a simple Oral Exam from your family dentist can often identify those at risk of serious issues to your overall health too, including Diabetes, Oral Cancer, Celiac Disease and HIV/AIDS.

Diabetes

Dental professionals are important in the collaborative inter-professional team care approach for early-detection and diabetes management. With a proper Oral or Periodontal Exam, a dentist can often identify those at risk for diabetes, and refer them to primary health/family physicians care providers for further assessment and medical advice.

There are strong links between high sugar & carbohydrate rich diets, tobacco, non-communicable diseases like diabetes and oral disease and your oral health. Persons with diabetes are more susceptible to gum disease, much like persons with gum disease are at greater risk of developing diabetes. The link between diabetes and your oral health is strong.

The mouth is the gateway to the body, so a dentist can tell a lot about a person through an oral exam - and if there is reason for concern.

A few common symptoms found in the mouth of patients with diabetes include:

- Dry Mouth which can cause dental decay;
- Gum disease - red, swollen or bleeding gums, gums pulling away from teeth, abscesses between gums, tooth loose or change in bite position;
- Persistent bad breath.

Most people with diabetes do not experience pain or discomfort with periodontal disease (gum disease), making it more difficult to detect without a proper Oral Exam. Relaying your family's medical history and discussing your diet and daily nutrition in addition to your Periodontal Exam is a great way to live a healthy and happy lifestyle.

More information on Diabetes is available on the [Canadian Diabetes Association website](#), [CDA oral health care articles online](#) or by contacting your family dentist.

The Canadian Diabetes Association has two articles [available online](#) for everyday at home, or in the dental office information - as diabetes education and awareness by you and your dentist is very important.

Oral Cancer

Oral cancer is one of the prolific and unfortunately deadly forms of cancer. Taking the life of a person every hour in North America alone, over 50 per cent of those diagnosed with Oral cancer pass away within 5 years of discovery. This is due in large to the difficulty in diagnosing this virus, which rarely shows itself like other mouth infections through lesions or discolourations. Oral cancer attacks the back of your mouth, in places such as the oropharynx and tonsils.

During an Oral Exam, your dentist will inspect the inside of your mouth - and is one of the best ways to reduce your risk of developing oral cancer, or increase your chances of early detection.

What causes oral cancer?

Everyone knows that smoking has been linked to cancer and other potential illnesses, but there are other lifestyle choices that contribute to oral cancer as well. Smokeless tobacco and alcohol consumption are two prominent activities that have oral cancer among people under 30 on the rise. Other illnesses such as the HPV16 virus have been linked to causing oral cancer, indicating that in an overall healthy lifestyle is never a bad idea.

How can I test myself for oral cancer?

Oral cancer is difficult to detect, often only being found once the cancer has spread to another area. There are however things you should look out for as potential warning signs:

- Colour changes in oral tissue
- Lumps, rough crusted spots or small areas which have eroded even though they may not be painful
- Sores that continue to bleed
- Difficulty in chewing, swallowing or moving your jaw or tongue
- Change in the sound of your voice

How can I prevent oral cancer?

The best way to stay on top of any health risk is to visit a physician on a regular basis. We suggest getting annual oral checkups twice a year, and perhaps even ask your dentist to perform an oral cancer exam. Lifestyle choices such as tobacco and heavy alcohol consumption in combination can increase risk up to 15 per cent. While gratuitous amounts of sun exposure and diets low in fruits and vegetables can also increase the risk of cancer.

Remember: *you may not be able to see it, but your dentist can*

HIV/AIDS

Often, early indicators of more serious health issues are found in the mouth, either by the patient noticing visual changes or experiencing discomfort, or by a dentist during an Oral Exam. In the case of HIV/AIDS, the mouth is often the first place signs of problematic symptoms start to show - enabling your family dentist to be able to recommend scheduling an appointment with a physician.

Because issues like HIV/AIDS are often hard to detect - it is important to discuss your drug, medical and dental history with your dentist.

Remember: *You may not be able to see it, but your dentist can*

Crowns

Also known as a cap, a crown is a hollow, artificial tooth used to cover a damaged or decayed tooth. It can be used to restore the shape, appearance and function of the tooth. You may need a crown if you have a root canal, a large filling in a tooth or a broken tooth.

If you need to have a tooth crowned, your dentist may do it, or he or she may refer you to a prosthodontist. A prosthodontist is a dentist who has completed a university post-graduate specialty program in prosthodontics. Prosthodontics is a specialty of dentistry that deals with restoring and replacing natural teeth and tissues with artificial substitutes.

Permanent crowns can be made from stainless steel, all metal (such as gold or another alloy), porcelain-fused-to-metal, all resin, or all ceramic.

Crowns are strong and generally last for about 10 years or longer if you take good care of them. Brush and floss your crown, just like you clean your natural teeth. Crowns may not be as strong as your natural teeth. So like your natural teeth, remember not to bite down on hard objects or use your teeth to open or cut things.

Root Canal Therapy

Root Canal Therapy, also referred to as an Endodontic treatment, is one method of saving a damaged tooth by treating the nerve, (sometimes called the pulp) located in the tooth's centre. Either your dentist or dental specialist called an Endodontist will perform the Root Canal Therapy. The procedure usually starts with isolating the damaged tooth and numbing it.

An opening is made through the chewing surface of the tooth and the damaged pulp is carefully removed from its canal inside the tooth. The canal is cleaned, shaped and enlarged. Each Root Canal procedure is different, and sometimes your dentist or Endodontist will decide to place a filling material in the root canal right away, and a temporary filling or restoration in the tooth's chewing surface. If you are prescribed any medications or antibiotics, like any prescription, it is important that you take them.

At the next dental appointment, your dentist or Endodontist will make certain any infection is completely gone, and the root canal and tooth surface will be permanently filled and sealed. If the tooth has a large filling, you may require a dental cap or crown, and additional appointments may be necessary. When the procedure is finished, you and your dentist will have succeeded in saving one of your most valuable assets - a natural tooth.

Gum Disease

Every day, plaque forms on your teeth. Periodontal Disease begins when bacterial infection caused by the plaque inflames gum tissue around your teeth and below the gum line where you can't see. This is usually a painless process. Over time, gum tissue and bone that support your teeth become destroyed. If left untreated, the condition often leads to tooth loss.

Am I at risk?

It's estimated that as many as eight out of ten Canadian adults suffer from some form of Periodontal Disease. If you smoke, have diabetes, or if you've never made a habit of flossing your teeth each day, you may be at even greater risk.

What are the warning signs?

At first, Periodontal Disease has few symptoms. As it progresses, you might notice your gums bleed easily, especially when you are brushing your teeth. You might notice that your gums are quite red, instead of their normally healthy pink colour, and you may suffer from bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth. You should see your dentist right away. These are all signs that Periodontal Disease is creating pockets by attacking the gums and the bones that support your teeth.

How can I prevent it?

Periodontal Disease can almost always be prevented. Basic home care and regular visits to your dentist for an examination and a professional cleaning are the best ways to start. And if you smoke, consider quitting. Tobacco use promotes Periodontal Disease. Brush your teeth at least twice a day with a soft-bristle tooth brush and floss daily. Dental floss cleans the areas your toothbrush can't reach- between your teeth and under the gum line. Rinsing with an antibacterial mouth rinse can help, but does not replace flossing. A professional cleaning in your dental office will remove the plaque you've missed and the hard tartar you can't remove yourself. Your dentist will also check for early warning signs that Periodontal Disease is creeping its way into spots you can't see. In its earliest stages, Periodontal Disease can often be reversed.

Can Periodontal Disease be treated?

Prevention is the best method of making sure your teeth and gums stay healthy, but if Periodontal Disease is discovered after the early stages it can often be successfully stopped. Possible treatment includes root planning (deep cleaning) and in some cases periodontal surgery to the “pockets” beneath the gum line or to regenerate damaged tissue. Your dentist may refer you to a dental specialist called a Periodontist for further treatment.