

## A Healthy Mouth for a Healthy Life...information to share with children and grandchildren

**Napoleon, OH--** As we age there are increasing challenges to staying healthy. Feeling invincible in our youth, we abused our bodies with fatty fried foods, a few smokes, a nightcap (or two), and getting too little sleep, while forgetting to brush and floss our teeth. Years of this lifestyle have contributed to many of the health problems we have today. Just pull the piece of paper from our purse or wallet that contains the laundry list of medications we are taking due to various ailments. Not to mention the fact that we surely did not have the time to exercise throughout our lives, right?

For all you baby boomers and beyond, here is your chance to save your children, and even more so your grandchildren, from the future ravages of poor health. Just think for a minute that all the nutrients a person needs to sustain him/herself come in through the mouth. Even the air we breathe comes in through our mouth sometimes. It is safe to say that it would be very beneficial to our whole body if we have a very healthy mouth. This article will cover topics that directly affect oral health. I hope you find the information useful and applicable to your own health issues.

**SMOKING/TOBACCO USE—**Periodontal disease is an infectious and inflammatory disease that destroys the gums and bone in your mouth. It affects nearly three out of four adults and smoking is the number one risk factor. Some warning signs of periodontal (gum) disease are red, swollen gums that bleed easily, pus between the teeth when the gums are pressed, persistent bad breath or bad taste, and loose or mobile teeth. If you have any of these signs please call a dentist. The bottom line is that smoking leads to periodontal disease, which leads to tooth loss. Long-term studies show one pack per day smokers lose an average of three teeth every ten years. With 90% of smokers starting before age 18, a pack a day smoker will lose over half of their teeth by retirement age. As a person's ability to chew nutritious foods decreases, the intake of unhealthy processed food increases. This cycle further jeopardizes overall health. The good news from the studies previously mentioned is that the risk of tooth loss decreases after you quit smoking. Another recent study showed a 70% increase in the need for root canal therapy in smokers compared to non-smokers. If you smoke, or once did, please warn your teen grandchildren not to ever start smoking. Female smoking is on the rise and the average age for a young girl to start smoking is now 14. Lung cancer is now the leading cancer in women, ahead of breast cancer.



Periodontal Disease



Healthy Gums and Teeth

For those of you kicking back and enjoying a leisurely cigar while reading this, please take note that cigars can have up to 40 times the nicotine and tar found in cigarettes. Cigar smokers have badly stained teeth and chronic bad breath. Cigar smokers also have four to 10 times the risk of dying from oral cancer as compared to non-smokers.

Spit tobacco and chewing tobacco cause significant damage to the mouth. They cause bad breath, discolor teeth, and promote cavities that lead to tooth loss. Oral cancer risk is greatly increased with smokeless tobacco. The most common sign of pre-cancer in smokeless tobacco users is leukoplakia, which is a white, scaly patch inside the mouth, lips, or cheeks. Red sores can also be precancerous.

Dentists are patients' first line of defense against the adverse effects of tobacco use and nicotine addiction. Dentists routinely screen for oral cancer and can help patients with tobacco cessation programs.

**DIABETES**—Diabetes affects nearly 16 million Americans today. The most common oral health problems associated with diabetes are tooth decay, gum disease, dry mouth, fungal infections, and delayed healing. Be sure to let your dentist know if you have been diagnosed with diabetes and if you take any medications related to diabetes. Dental checkups, periodontal screenings, and professional cleanings at the dental office are important for evaluating overall dental health and for treating problems at their initial stages. Excellent preventive home care and well-controlled blood glucose levels will minimize oral health effects.

Now let us look at why diabetes is on the rise. The World Health Organization has estimated that one in three children born in the year 2000 will develop diabetes. Preventing overweight and obese children and adolescents is a key to preventing Type 2 (adult onset) diabetes and heart disease. Obesity is becoming an increasing risk factor for gum disease, especially in young adults (18-34 years). Encourage your children and grandchildren to get regular exercise and eat a healthy diet. The best way to do this is by example.

**BIPHOSPHONATES**—Lastly, I wanted to touch on this hot subject in dentistry that affects the aging population, especially women. What are biphosphonates anyway? They are drugs prescribed to treat osteoporosis/osteopenia, Paget's disease, and to reduce bone loss in cancer patients. The drugs in this class come in IV form (Zometa and Aredia) and in oral form (Fosamax, Actonel, and Boniva). The concern in dentistry is the

development of a condition called osteonecrosis. It is a disfiguring jaw condition that includes serious infection and buildup of abnormal fragile bone following intraoral trauma such as surgery or denture irritation. The IV forms are more likely to cause this condition. Be sure to let your dentist know if you are taking one of these drugs. Extraction of teeth, gum surgery, and implant placement are to be avoided. Teeth should be saved with root canal therapy if at all possible. The best treatment is prevention, so any and all necessary dental work should be completed prior to going on biphosphonates, especially the IV form. Consult your dentist if your physician is considering one of these drugs. DO NOT discontinue therapy without discussing it with your physician. For more information check out [www.nof.org](http://www.nof.org), the website for the National Osteonecrosis Foundation.

Use the information provided here for discussion with a dentist at your regular checkups. If you do not have a dentist, please find one and schedule a visit. It could very well save your life. Share this information with your children and grandchildren and you may save a few more.

If you have any questions, feel free to e-mail me your questions at [info@simplythebeginning.com](mailto:info@simplythebeginning.com).

*Michael D. Carpenter, DDS is a general dentist with a focus on sedation, implants, TMD/TMJ, and complex reconstructive dentistry practicing in Napoleon, Ohio. He is an LVI Fellow and member of the IACA, ICOI, ADA, AGD, ODA, and Maumee Valley Dental Society. He may be contacted through his website at [www.TheNapoleonDentist.com](http://www.TheNapoleonDentist.com).*