**Six surprising tips to look better, feel better and stay healthier**

Oral health is critical to overall health. Good oral health prevents infection, helps manage diabetes and keeps you looking younger, longer. But a recent survey in Washington revealed that many of us don’t know how to prevent gum disease, or how to avoid painful and costly cavities. Here are six surprising tips to protect your oral health, save money ‑ and stay healthy.

**Surprise #1 - You’re more fit if your mouth is fit.**

Oral health affects health and fitness. Poor oral health has been linked to heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Teeth and gums also affect your appearance. You won’t look your best if you’re missing a tooth or have a stinky infection in your mouth. And you can’t feel your best if that infection spreads to other parts of your body. Get regular oral health checkups to detect problems that might quickly get worse and expensive to treat. Preventing and taking care of problems early is especially important for older adults since Medicare doesn’t cover dental care.

**Surprise #2 – Flossing keeps you looking younger longer.** Flossing daily cleans the 40 percent of your tooth surfaces that brushing doesn’t reach. Flossing helps you look younger longer by preventing gum disease which leads to receding gums, a telltale sign of aging.

**Surprise #3 – Gum disease is an infection that makes it harder to manage diabetes.** If you have diabetes you’re three times as likely to develop gum disease, and gum disease makes it harder to control blood sugar.People with diabetes should get regular dental checkups**.**

**Surprise #4 – Dry mouth can quickly lead to tooth decay.** Dry mouth, a common side effect of many medications and medical conditions, can cause major oral health problems. Manage dry mouth by sipping water throughout the day. Ask your doctor, dentist or pharmacist about other dry mouth treatments.

**Surprise #5 – Cavities are caused by infectious germs**

Sweet or high-carb foods and drinks feed the germs that cause decay. After eating, these germs make acid. The acid attacks teeth for 20 minutes or more, literally eating away tooth enamel. The result: cavities. **Another big surprise, it’s the frequency of snacking (or sipping) — not just the type of snack — that leads to tooth decay.**  Continually snacking (or sipping sweetened lattes, juice or soda) throughout the day means teeth are exposed to a constant acid attack. When you have a snack, it’s better to eat it all at once rather than nibbling throughout the day.

Even more surprising is that cavity-causing germs are infectious. The germs can actually be spread via saliva (typically from moms to babies) by sharing food, utensils, or even kisses. If you’re pregnant, get any active decay treated before your baby is born. Poor oral health also can cause complications during pregnancy.

**Surprise #6 – Cavities are preventable.**

Cavities are not inevitable; they are almost 100 percent preventable. Brushing, flossing, healthy snacking and regular oral health checkups lead to good oral health. The use of fluoride helps too. Fluoride toothpaste, fluoride varnish and fluoridated water, are proven tools to prevent cavities because they strengthen teeth.

**Good oral health saves you money and makes life better**

Protecting your oral health saves time, money and pain. The good news is you can keep your teeth as long as you live (and eat all the foods you love), if you take care of your mouth. Unleash the power of good oral health. Your appearance and health will benefit, and so will your wallet.

If you like your teeth, learn how to protect them for life by visiting, TheMightyMouth.org

