



# A healthier smile, a healthier you

The power of preventive dental care

Dental health isn't just about having a sparkling smile. It plays a big role in your whole health. That's why preventive dental care — which includes going to the dentist and practicing healthy habits at home — is key.

## Why dental health matters at every life stage

Our mouths are full of bacteria, most of which is harmless. However, when we don't practice good dental hygiene, that bacteria can spread to other parts of the body and cause illness or disease. Issues such as tooth loss and cavities can also affect our self-esteem and make everyday activities, including eating and speaking, more difficult.



### Children

Cavities are the most common chronic disease among children in the United States, and tooth decay can start as young as six months. Starting healthy habits early, like supervised brushing and limiting sugary snacks and drinks, also leads to better dental health throughout life.



### Pregnant women

Dental health is a key part of a healthy pregnancy. That's because pregnant women are at a higher risk for issues such as gum disease and cavities, which can also affect a baby's health.



### Adults

The potential for cavities, tooth loss, and gum disease continues as you and your teeth age. These can lead to other health issues that are more serious. Preventing problems — or catching them early — can also save you money, before they become more costly or difficult to treat.

## What is preventive dental care?

### Healthy habits checklist

- Have regular dental checkups
- Brush your teeth and tongue at least twice a day with a soft-bristled toothbrush
- Floss daily
- Limit sugary foods and drinks
- Don't smoke or use tobacco products

### Regular visits with your dentist

Dental checkups give your dentist the chance to deep clean your teeth, look for any issues, and teach you healthy habits to practice at home. Going twice a year is a good rule of thumb, but pregnant women and people with certain medical conditions might need to visit more often.

## What to do if you need urgent dental care

Even with the right preventive care, sometimes urgent issues come up. Knowing where to go when that happens can save you time and money.



### Call your primary dentist

A toothache or a broken tooth can seem like an emergency, but it's best to call your primary dentist first. That's because emergency rooms (ERs) and even urgent care facilities don't have dentists on staff. Dental offices often have a phone number on their after-hours recordings to call in situations that require immediate care.



### Consider virtual care

If your dentist isn't available, virtual care through The Teledentists® might be an option. Virtual dentists can give you a personalized treatment plan or write prescriptions for issues such as toothaches, gum infections, or bleeding. The cost is the same as an in-office visit. Learn more, or make an appointment at [theteledentists.com/anthem](https://theteledentists.com/anthem).

Going to the ER or calling 911 is always your best option for emergencies. If you believe you are having a life-threatening emergency or your health is in serious jeopardy, call 911 right away.

#### Sources:

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## Make time for a dental checkup

If it's been more than six months since your last dental visit, schedule one today. To find a dentist in your plan's network, use the Find Care & Cost feature in the Sydney<sup>SM</sup> Health app or at [anthem.com](https://www.anthem.com).