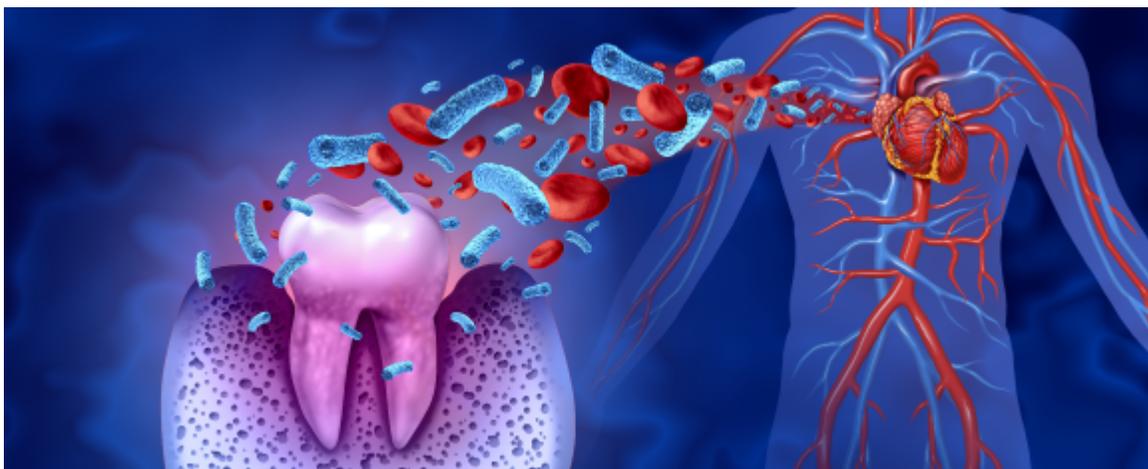


February 2022

## Oral Wellness Newsletter

*Hello everyone! Here's our February newsletter. The content is easy to share - just use the "forward this email" button. Or highlight the text you want, then copy and paste it wherever you like. It's that simple.*



### Do you have a heart condition? Tell your dentist

Have you been diagnosed with a heart condition? If so, your dentist needs to know. There are special considerations when it comes to treating heart patients. So, depending on the reason for your office visit, the dentist will likely take extra steps to keep you safe and prevent complications.

#### Special prep for routine exams and cleanings

Sometimes gums can bleed slightly during a dental cleaning, leaving spots where bacteria can get into your bloodstream. If oral bacteria get into your bloodstream through broken gum tissue, it can spread to your heart.

To prevent infection from developing, the dentist may have you take antibiotics before your procedure. According to the American Heart Association, premedication with antibiotics is recommended for people with valve replacements, heart transplants, endocarditis and some heart defects.<sup>[1]</sup>

#### Oral surgery while on blood thinners

Anticoagulants, or blood thinners, make it harder for your body to form clots. Taking these medicines can cause heavier-than-normal bleeding during your procedure.<sup>[2]</sup> Some herbal remedies, vitamins and over-the-counter drugs can also affect clotting. So, give your surgeon an entire list of the medications you're taking.

But don't worry, an experienced oral surgeon knows what to do for excess bleeding. Typically, biting down on a wad of gauze to apply pressure will stop it.

## Early gum disease treatment

Gum disease is caused by the bacteria in sticky plaque that can build up on your teeth. If plaque isn't removed by regular brushing or dental cleanings, it can cause gums to become inflamed and infected.

People with gum disease are at greater risk of having a heart attack, stroke or other serious heart issue.\* So your dentist will keep a watchful eye out for symptoms such as redness and swelling, bleeding and receding gums.

Gum disease is preventable with proper oral care. And mild gum disease is reversible when caught early and treated with your dentist's help.

## Read more about heart disease and your oral health

### Sources

\*[health.harvard.edu](https://www.health.harvard.edu); [Gum disease and heart disease: the common thread](#); February 2021.

1. [Heart.org](#); [Infective Endocarditis](#); March 2021.

2. [Webmd.com](#); [Dental care for people with heart disease](#); July 2021.



## Break your child's pacifier or thumb-sucking habit

Weaning a child off their pacifier or thumb can be challenging, especially with a stubborn kindergartener.

Thumb-sucking soothes babies when they aren't feeding—even babies in the womb have been seen on ultrasound sucking their thumb. Most kids ditch the habit by the time they're toddlers. But for children who continue longer, it can be problematic.

### When should kids stop?

According to the [American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry](#), pacifiers should be discouraged by age 3. Prolonged pacifier use can cause both [dental and speech problems](#). After all, it's hard to learn to speak clearly and articulate with a pacifier in your mouth! Ideally, children should stop as soon as they are able to prevent problems with their bite, teeth alignment and jaw growth. Use of an [orthodontically correct pacifier](#), rather than a traditional one, before three months of age can lessen the chance for bite issues, thumb-sucking or other poor oral health habits.

### What if your child won't drop the habit?

You might have your own memories of learning to stop thumb-sucking—of bitter preventive cream or being teased at school or a sleepover. But keep in mind that punishment and harsh words aren't constructive. Instead, help them break the habit early.

It's usually easier to wean children off the binky than off their thumb. For starters, use an orthodontically correct pacifier or limit use by hiding it and, eventually, throwing it out as soon as possible. Obviously, you can't control thumbs in this way!

Experts advise parents to praise kids for not sucking. And since most kids suck their thumb when they're stressed, cranky, tired or insecure, get to the root of the problem. Suggest a cuddle or story time instead. This can promote learning and help them replace a harmful practice with a good one—a win-win.

### **Call in the Tooth Fairy reinforcements!**

February 28 is National Tooth Fairy Day – the perfect timing for a “surprise visit” to your child. Imagine the excitement when she leaves a letter under the pillow, asking for their binky back or offering a pep talk to help stop thumb-sucking. There are plenty of cute, customizable templates online, or get creative and make your own.

If positive reinforcement doesn't work and your child is still sucking their thumb at near school-age, talk to your pediatrician or dentist for advice. To learn more about oral wellness tips for kids, visit [United Concordia's Oral Health Resources](#).



## **Rheumatoid arthritis and oral health**

If you're one of many people who have rheumatoid arthritis (RA), and the stiff hands and jaw that often go along with it, you may find it hard to brush and floss your teeth. RA is an inflammatory disease that causes swollen, painful joints, most commonly in the hands, wrists and feet.

If you can't brush and floss properly, plaque and bacteria can build up on your teeth and cause periodontitis, or gum disease, which may fuel inflammation in the joints.<sup>[1]</sup> Untreated gum disease can lead to periodontitis, a serious condition that destroys the bone that supports your teeth.

People with RA can make their toothbrush easier to hold by wrapping the handle with tape or other material to create a larger gripping surface or using a large-handled electric toothbrush that helps with effective brushing. Using a floss holder or floss pick are good alternatives to traditional flossing if that's difficult.

### **Treating gum disease may help RA**

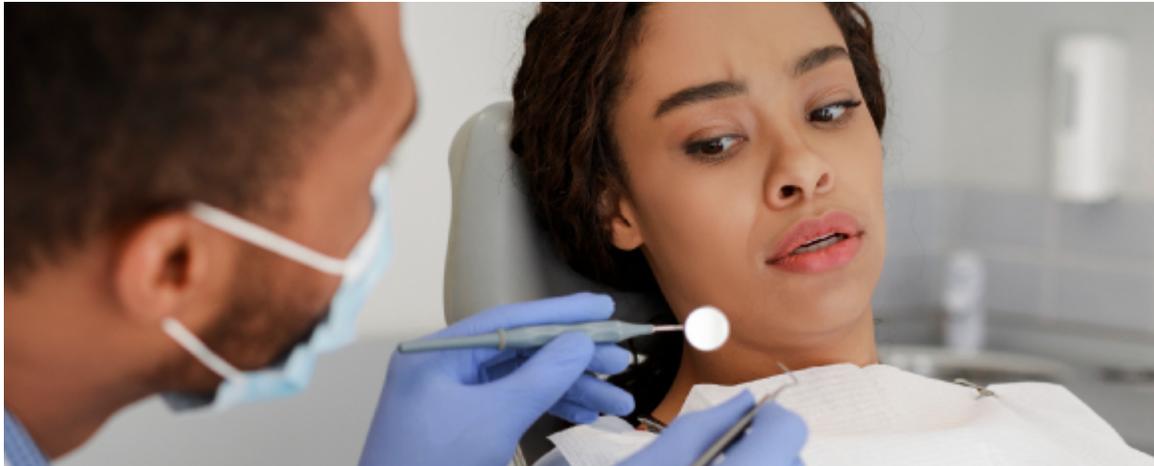
Untreated gum disease can lead to periodontitis, a serious condition that destroys the bone that support your teeth. With periodontitis, your gums get infected with harmful bacteria that doesn't just stay in your mouth. It travels through your bloodstream, impacting your whole body – including your joints. But people who get professional treatment for their gum disease

can have significantly less pain and stiffness and fewer swollen, painful joints.<sup>[1]</sup> Treatment typically consists of specialized cleaning called “scaling and root planing,” which removes bacteria from tooth surfaces and root surfaces underneath the gumline.

Other oral complications that can result from RA are temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorder, which causes jaw pain; Sjögren’s syndrome, which can cause dry mouth; ulcers and canker sores; and increased risk for infection. Be sure to talk to your dentist if you are experiencing any of these symptoms.

#### Sources

1. Rath L., Arthritis Foundation, *Mouth Bacteria May Trigger RA*. April 14, 2021.



## Technology to distract you at the dentist

You’re not alone if you’d rather eat live bees than see your dentist! Many of us experience general anxiety about dental visits, but an estimated 25% of Americans are considered “dental phobic,” meaning they have an extreme fear of going to the dentist. If this is you, it’s important to at least minimize anxiety to the point where you can still seek dental treatment when you need it. If deep breathing just isn’t enough, think about trying a few of these technology-based relaxation techniques at your next dental visit.

**Smartphone apps:** We’ve all heard of the relaxation apps available on a smartphone, but have you ever thought about using one at the dentist? A variety of options are available, such as mindfulness- or meditation-style apps, or one that plays nature sounds, and many of them are free. Most are very user friendly, so we suggest trying out a few to see what works best for you. Be careful to pay attention to “free trial periods,” in-app purchases and privacy issues.

**Virtual reality systems:** These are not yet common in dental offices, but if available they can provide a drug-free solution for dental phobia. A virtual reality (VR) system can distract your brain from worry and pain surrounding dental treatment by immersing you in an interactive, virtual world, complete with sights, sounds and motion. Studies have shown that using VR can actually reduce patient reports of pain during medical procedures, including periodontal treatment.<sup>[1]</sup> In one study, pain relief during procedures where patients used VR was twice that delivered by morphine.<sup>[2]</sup>

**Listen to music or read:** Sitting in the waiting room can heighten anxiety, and distracting yourself by reading or listening to music through headphones can help you to relax. Due to COVID19 restrictions, many dental and doctor offices do not provide magazines in the waiting room, so bring your own materials.

If you still can't relax, discuss other options with your dentist that can help calm your nerves. Your dentist could possibly prescribe a sedative for you to take prior to your procedure. Or you could consider sedation dentistry as an alternative option.

And don't forget—the best way to beat your fear of the dentist is to avoid tooth decay! If you have healthy teeth, you don't have to fear a dental procedure, right? Practice good oral health habits by brushing at least twice every day and flossing daily.

#### Sources

1. Varshneya R., *Oral Health*, [3 ways technology can help alleviate anxiety in dental patients](#). August 31, 2020.
2. Schermerhorn L. Can virtual reality change your dental practice? It's worked for others, *Dentistry IQ*, posted January 10, 2020.



## Pets need oral care, too!

Did you know that animals with clean teeth live longer? Well, it's National Pet Dental Health Month and we're here to tell you it's true! If you consider your pet as family, it's really important to pay close attention to their teeth. Dental checks are as important to animals as they are to us, and looking after their dental health can significantly prevent future oral health problems and improve their overall health.<sup>[1]</sup>

By the time many owners notice their pet is having a dental issue, most commonly when they stop eating, it's often too late to fix the problem. If your dog, cat or other pet has bad breath, yellow or broken teeth, red or bleeding gums or changes in appetite or behavior, it may be a sign of a significant oral problem.

Periodontal (gum) disease is the most common dental problem with cats and dogs. Advanced periodontal disease can cause severe problems and pain for your pet, so early detection and treatment are crucial. And this doesn't affect just your pet's mouth—Other health problems found in association with periodontal disease include kidney, liver, and heart muscle issues.

Read below to learn how to keep your pet's mouth healthy and avoid illness and more costly procedures or treatments.

### The vet's a safe bet

Veterinary visits include a mouth exam, so your vet will be able to determine if any dental issues are present. You should take your pet to the vet at least once a year. He or she may need x-rays to evaluate the health of the jaw and the tooth roots below the gumline. Your pet will receive anesthesia for the exam and cleaning, as he or she cannot understand the benefit of dental procedures and reacts by moving, trying to escape or even biting. The benefits of anesthesia outweigh the risk, as it reduces the stress and pain for your pet, as well as allows for a better cleaning.<sup>[2]</sup>

You can also ask your vet about what type of diet your pet should eat for good oral health.

### **Brush your pet's teeth**

Taking care of your pet's teeth at home may reduce the frequency or even eliminate the need for professional cleanings. Pet stores sell toothbrushes and toothpaste specifically designed for animals. Purchase these items and go to town! Most dogs enjoy the taste of the paste and will let you scrub away; cats may be a little more finicky. Many groomers also offer tooth-brushing services. **DO NOT** use toothpaste designed for humans—it could be toxic to your pet.<sup>[1]</sup>

#### **Sources**

1. National Today, Pet Dental Health Month, Accessed January 2022.
2. American Veterinary Medical Association, Pet Dental Care, Accessed January 2022.



### **Tooth or False?**

**With each issue of the Oral Wellness Newsletter, we'll ask a true or false questions that will debunk dentistry myths and inform you about your oral health!**

*Bleeding gums after brushing your teeth is normal and no cause for concern.*

#### **FALSE**

Your gums should not bleed after you brush or floss your teeth! Bleeding, red, swollen or tender gums could be a warning sign of periodontal (gum) disease. The mildest form of gum disease, gingivitis, usually presents with little or no discomfort and fortunately is reversible at this stage. So don't ignore the little bit of red you might see on your toothbrush. It's important to get checked for gum disease and treated if necessary.

If gingivitis is left untreated, it can advance to periodontitis. As plaque, and the bacteria in it, continues to spread beyond the gumline, toxins produced irritate and destroy the tissue and bone that support the teeth. As gums separate from the teeth, pockets form and can harbor infection, which further destroy gum tissue and bone. Other signs of progressive gum disease are loose teeth, mouth sores, persistent bad breath or a change in how your teeth close when biting.

#### **Source**

Robinson, KM. WebMD, [Bleeding Gums and Your Health](#), December 2020.

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