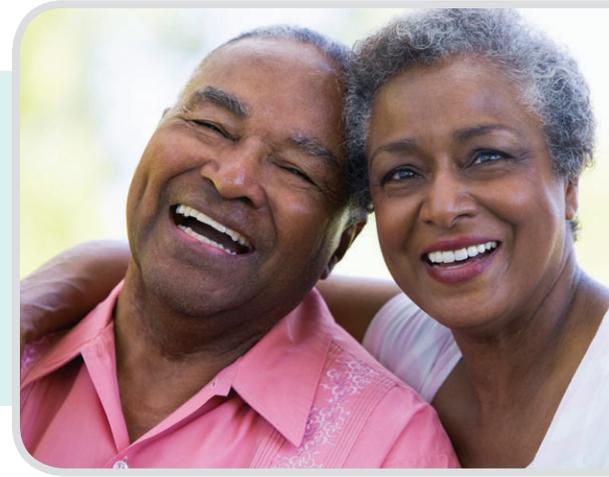


# FIVE DENTAL AND VISION CARE MUST-DOS



Healthy teeth and gums – and good eye care – are vitally important to your overall good health. Have regular checkups to prevent a host of problems, and follow these common-sense dental and vision care “must-dos.”

## #1—Practice good hygiene

Good personal hygiene can help you avoid infections caused by viruses and bacteria. Gum inflammation results from food particles decaying between teeth. Common eye infections include “pinkeye” or conjunctivitis, and blepharitis, an infection of the eyelids with redness, itchiness, and crusty scales.

### To avoid gum inflammation:

- **Brush twice a day** to remove plaque, which leads to tooth decay and gum disease. Also, brush after consuming sugary drinks or snacks. If you wear braces, brush especially well, because braces can lead to cavities.
- **Floss daily** to prevent cavities, gum disease, and bad breath.

### To avoid eye infections:

- **Wash your hands often** and thoroughly before and after touching your eyes or face or using eye medication. If you have an eyelid infection, wash your face often.
- **Don’t rub your eyes** because germs on your fingers can deliver bacteria directly to your eyes.
- **Keep it to yourself** by not sharing eye makeup, eye medicine, contact lens containers or solutions, towels, linens or pillows. Remove eye makeup before bedtime.
- **Don’t use** makeup or contacts while you have an eye infection because you can contaminate them and reinfect yourself. Throw away contaminated makeup and clean contacts thoroughly.

## #2—Be proactive about protection

Teeth and mouth injuries commonly occur from falls and sports mishaps and most often include the front teeth, tongue, lips, and inner cheeks. Eye injuries are also common and can be either minor or result in permanent loss of eyesight.

### To protect your teeth from injury:

- **Wear protective gear** when playing sports and include mouth guards and face cages.
- **Wear a helmet** when riding a motorcycle or bicycle.
- **Avoid chewing** ice and popcorn kernels, which can chip or break your teeth.
- **Avoid tongue and lip piercings**, which can chip and damage teeth.

### To protect your eyes from injury:

- **Check your home for obstacles** that may cause a fall, like a throw rug or toys on the floor.
- **Wear protective eye gear** for sports and work- or hobby-related activities, such as when you use power tools, hammers, chemicals, or welding tools. Eye protection is also required for playing racquetball and in tanning booths.

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Guidance when you need it most

- **Pay attention to your surroundings** because eye injuries can result from an eye poke from a finger, a tree branch, a fist, a baseball, sharp objects, falls, or flying objects.
- **Don't ever look directly into the sun**, and avoid looking at the brightly lit beach, water, or snow-covered areas where the sun can reflect into your eyes. Wear good-quality sunglasses outdoors.

### #3—Rely on the experts

See your doctor or dentist whenever a problem occurs.

To check your teeth:

- **See your dentist twice a year** for checkups and cleanings. Meanwhile, watch for changes in your mouth, gums, or on your tongue – such as spots, cuts, swellings, or growths.
- **See your dentist often if you're a smoker**, because you're at an increased risk of developing oral cancer. Certain health conditions also require more frequent consultations with your dentist.

To check your vision:

- **Have your children's eyes screened.** Several conditions can threaten a child's vision if not tested and treated properly. School nurses are often the first to spot these problems.
- **Get an annual eye exam.** Early diagnosis of changes in the eye can prevent vision loss because of injury, aging, diabetes and other health conditions, smoking, drinking, and prolonged sun exposure.
- **Get an annual diabetes retinopathy exam if you have diabetes.** Diabetes complications can result in damage to the retinal blood vessels, which – if undetected and left untreated – can lead to blindness. But an annual

retinopathy exam and early treatment can eliminate the risk of blindness almost entirely.

### #4—Eat right

Good nutrition is one of the best preventions for dental and vision problems.

To protect your tooth enamel:

- **Avoid or limit sports drinks** because they can stain, soften, and erode your teeth. If you do drink a sports drink, wait at least 30 minutes before brushing your teeth to allow softened enamel to get hard again.
- **Avoid or limit sugary, sour, and starchy treats.** Some dentists suggest these snacks are like soaking your teeth in battery acid. Both adults and children are vulnerable to softening and eroding teeth enamel with common snacks, including:
  - > **Sugary and sticky treats** – like cookies, cakes, ice cream, dried fruits, and raisins.
  - > **Acidic, low-pH foods** – like sour and sticky candies, soft drinks, and fruit juices.

To minimize the effect of the snacks, eat them with other foods or chew xylitol-containing or Recaldent-containing gum (like Ice Breakers, Ice Cubes, Trident, or Orbit). Better yet, brush after snacking.

To protect your vision:

- **Practice lifelong good nutrition** because it can help keep your eyes healthy. The National Eye Institute says your eyesight can benefit from many of the nutrients found in vegetables and fruits.
- **Eat right to avoid or control diabetes**, which can lead to diabetic eye disease or glaucoma. But, experts say

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that diabetics who control their blood sugar levels can prevent or slow down the onset of diabetic retinopathy.

- **Eat right to keep your cholesterol and blood pressure in check.** Studies show that both elevated blood pressure and cholesterol can increase the risk of vision loss. Controlling these will help your overall health as well as protect your vision.

## #5–Don't smoke

Quitting smoking can have many good effects on your health – including protection for your teeth, gums, mouth, and eyes.

### To protect your teeth, gums, and soft tissue

- **Quit smoking to reduce your risk** of gum disease, bad breath, tooth discoloration, oral cancer and a host of other cancers.

### To protect your eyesight:

- **Quit smoking to decrease your risk** of developing these eye diseases:
  - Age-related macular degeneration
  - Cataracts
  - Glaucoma
  - Diabetic retinopathy if you're diabetic

## Bottom line

A host of vision and dental problems are often prevented with these common-sense must-dos. Take care of your eyes and your teeth – and you'll be happier and healthier.

## Sources:

- Prevent Blindness America – [www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org)
- The National Eye Institute – [www.nei.nih.gov](http://www.nei.nih.gov)

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