# How do I keep my **teeth** and **gums** healthy?

Get your teeth cleaned often. Before you get your teeth cleaned, tell your dentist about any medicines you are taking. Even if you have no natural teeth, you should still see your dentist.

## Why should I get my teeth cleaned?

Set up a dentist visit every 3 months for a teeth cleaning to keep your teeth and gums healthy. Routine teeth cleanings:

- lower the amount of bacteria (tiny germs) in your mouth
- keep your mouth clean and help it fight off germs
- lower the amount of plaque you have on your teeth

## What is plaque?

Plaque is a sticky layer of film that collects on your teeth.

Plaque comes from:

- Food
- Drinks
- Other things you may put in your mouth like cigarettes or smokeless tobacco. Smoking and using tobacco may make your mouth feel dry. When your mouth is dry, plaque can build up.



Plaque can build up on your teeth if you don't get them cleaned often. When plaque builds up, it can make your teeth and gums swell and hurt. This can turn into periodontal disease.

## What is periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease is when your gums and the parts around your teeth get infected (unhealthy and sick). If someone in your family has periodontal disease, you may have it too. You may have more spaces between your teeth if you have periodontal disease.

Periodontal disease is very serious. It can also be painful. If you have periodontal disease and you don't take care of it, you may lose your teeth. If you have questions about your teeth or gums, call your dentist.

## What are other ways I can keep my teeth and gums healthy?

- Drink lots of water.
- Brush your teeth 2 times per day for 2 minutes each time. Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush.
- Floss once a day.
- Do not use tobacco like cigarettes, cigars, pipes, and smokeless tobacco. Tobacco can make your teeth and gums unhealthy.
- Do not drink more than 1 to 2 alcoholic drinks per day. You are more likely to get oral (mouth) and throat cancer if you drink lots of alcohol (beer, wine).
- If you are pregnant or thinking about having a baby, make sure to see your dentist.
- If you are getting cancer treatments, make sure to see your dentist.