

## Oral Hygiene

The American Dental Hygienists' Association established October National Dental Month in 2009 to raise awareness for dental hygiene and oral health. With the upcoming trick-or-treating and increase in candy consumption, what better month to review oral health? We all know we are supposed to floss and brush our teeth, right? Often, we only consider going to the dentist to avoid or treat cavities, brushing to make our teeth pretty, or only flossing when we get items stuck between our teeth. But, have you considered that your mouth is an entry way to your digestive and respiratory system and that germs and bacteria could spread to your body? Your oral health is strongly correlated with many health conditions that can affect your overall health. I know, it was a surprise to me when I first learned that oral health was not ONLY about my teeth.

The mouth is full of germs and bacteria from the air we breathe, the foods we eat, tobacco use, alcohol use, and other factors such as saliva reducing medications such as decongestants. The germs and bacteria grow on and around each tooth in our mouth that can evolve into plaque that is difficult to remove resulting in inflammation that causes tooth decay and/or gum disease and ultimately oral disease if not addressed. Some of the signs that you may notice with poor oral hygiene could include tooth pain, dental caries (cavities), tooth decay/tooth loss, tooth pain, bleeding gums, loose teeth, jaw swelling, bad breath, or swollen or receding gums. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), sugary processed foods are correlated to the rise in oral disease estimating 3.5 billion, or every 3 out of 4 people being affected that could lead to other health issues. The Mayo Clinic lists oral cancer, cardiovascular disease including endocarditis (infection of the lining of the heart), vascular diseases (clogged or weak vessels), pregnancy complications, preterm birth, and even pneumonia being associated with oral disease.

The good news is that oral disease is mostly preventable. Creating an oral hygiene routine with your family, seeing your dentist regularly for cleanings and exams, reducing sugary drinks/foods, reducing and/or eliminating tobacco products, brushing twice daily with a quality fluoride-based tooth paste, and flossing daily are ways to improve and possibly reverse oral conditions. Not only is prevention cheaper than treating oral disease, with most insurances offering cleanings every 6 months, it is also less painful.

According to the 2023 MCHD Community Health Assessment, Meigs County has statistically less dental and medical providers compared to residents than the state and national average, potentially contributing poorer health outcomes. Despite these challenges, there are wonderful dental clinics throughout the county in three locations provided by Hopewell Health Systems located in Pomeroy, Eastern, and Racine.

Please visit [www.meigs-health.com](http://www.meigs-health.com) and find our Meigs County Quick Reference Guide for a wide range of contacts in the county.

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