



# Oral Health and Respiratory Illness

## How your oral health can affect your respiratory health

### The Link Between Oral and Overall Health

Though many of us would not automatically think to link the condition of our mouths to the overall health of our bodies, recent research suggests that the two are more closely related than previously thought. Poor oral hygiene and the inflammation that often accompanies have been linked to major health issues from low birth weight to diabetic complications.

When we don't brush properly or routinely get professional dental cleanings, bacteria continue to replicate and live in our mouths. This build-up (tartar) can cause gum disease and inflammation. Eventually, if inflammation isn't treated, our bodies can respond by attacking our healthy tissues and organs. Chronic inflammation can also increase the risk of developing serious diseases, like heart disease, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, and even cancer.

### The Link Between Oral and Respiratory Illness

Bacteria living in our mouths can enter our respiratory system by simply breathing. In most cases, our immune systems are able to fight off the bacteria, in others, this travelling bacteria can cause some serious respiratory infections like bronchitis or bacterial pneumonia. Maintaining good oral hygiene reduces the amount of bacteria in our mouths, thus preventing oral bacteria from travelling to the respiratory system.

Viruses and bacterial infections are also spread through saliva or mucus. We can help reduce spreading illness by thoroughly brushing our teeth and using antiseptic mouthwash to remove/kill as much bacteria as possible. Replacing your toothbrush after an illness can also help prevent bacteria from spreading to family members' toothbrushes.

Good oral health isn't just about having a pretty smile. More than ever before, we are learning just how our oral health can affect our overall health and are realizing the vital role good oral hygiene plays in our overall wellness.



### High Risk Groups

Those who already suffer from chronic respiratory conditions are especially susceptible to bacterial respiratory illness. Poor oral health and hygiene can worsen existing respiratory issues for those who are:

- COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) patients
- Elderly
- Smokers
- Cancer or HIV patients

Make sure to mention any existing respiratory illness to your dentist so they can consider your needs when creating their treatment plans.



For more oral health information, please visit our website at [www.bcbsfedental.com](http://www.bcbsfedental.com).



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