

# Oral health

affects your whole body.  
It's an important part of your HIV care.

*Did you know...*

Many oral health problems can be prevented or readily treated.





# Take care of your mouth.

People with HIV often have weakened immune systems that may contribute to oral health problems. Many of these problems with the teeth, gums, or mouth can be prevented or quickly treated.

If you are HIV-positive, tell your dental health care provider so they can give you the best care possible. They can work with your doctors, nurses, and case managers to make sure you get the treatment you need. The sooner you get treatment, the sooner you will feel better.

Some oral health problems are painful. They can make eating and drinking uncomfortable. Early treatment can take care of these problems and stop them from getting worse.

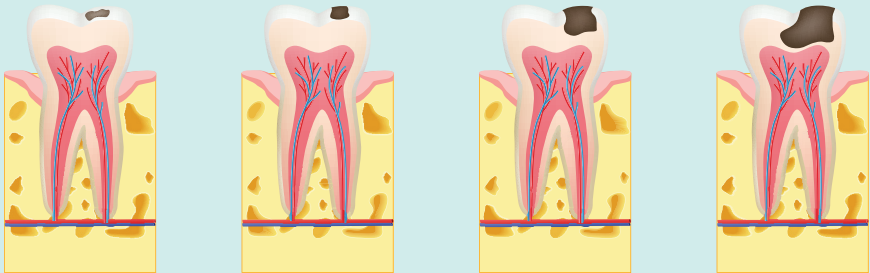


## TIP

Dental floss cleans areas where a toothbrush cannot reach. If you have problems using dental floss, ask your dentist how you can clean between your teeth.

# Cavities and Gum Disease

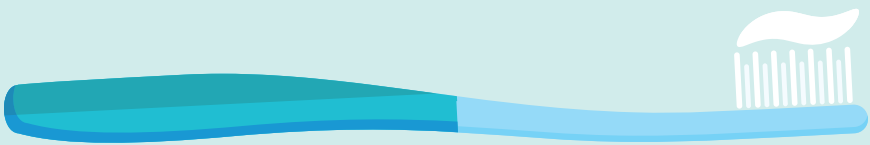
## What are cavities?



Cavities are soft spots or small holes in your teeth. They're caused by a sticky, white coating on your teeth. It's called, plaque (plak).

Plaque is made up of bacteria (germs) and tiny bits of food left in your mouth. These bacteria make acid that eats away at your teeth. Good oral health care at home helps prevent cavities by getting rid of plaque. Brush and floss your teeth regularly.

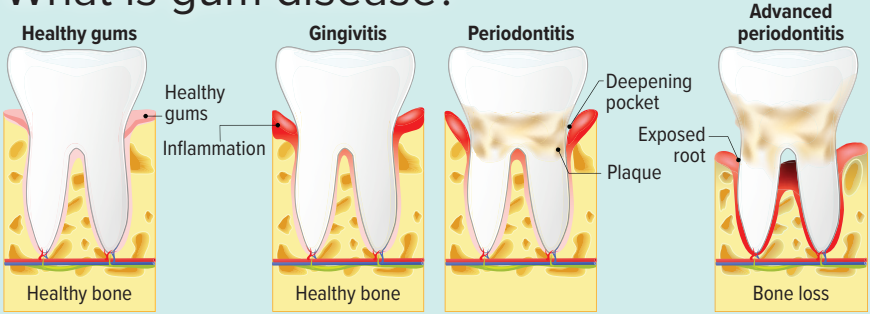
At first, a cavity is small and does not hurt. As it gets deeper, it becomes painful. A root canal may be needed to save your tooth. When a cavity is not treated, it can lead to a dangerous infection in your mouth. You may even lose your tooth.



### TIP

Choose a toothpaste with fluoride and use a soft-bristled toothbrush. Change your toothbrush every 3 to 4 months. Change it sooner if the bristles wear out.

# What is gum disease?



Your gums and bone hold your teeth in your mouth. You have gum disease when the gums and bone in your mouth gets infected. Many people with HIV have gum disease that gets worse very fast.

Signs to look for:

- red or swollen gums
- gums that bleed when you brush or floss your teeth
- gums that are pulling away from your teeth
- loose teeth

See your dentist regularly. Early treatment of gum disease is important. If gum disease is not treated, your teeth may shift or get so loose they may need to be removed.



# Infections and Mouth Sores

People with HIV are more likely to have sores and infections in their mouth. This includes the tongue and lips. The most common types of sores or infections that affect people with HIV are:

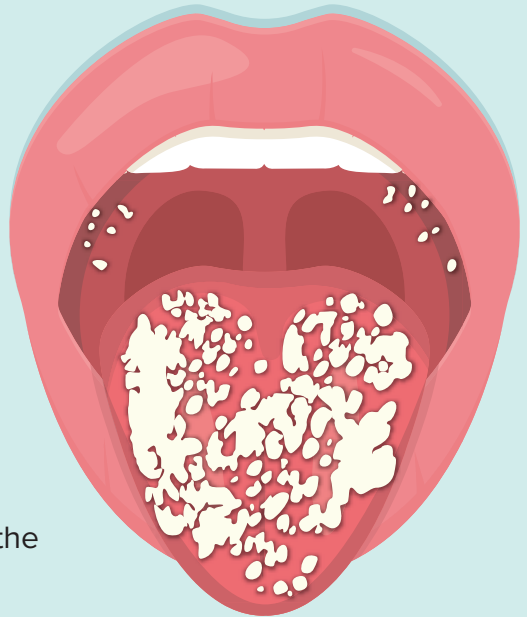
- Thrush – candidiasis (kan-dee-die-eh-sis)
- Mouth sores – canker sores, cold sores, or fever blisters. Some of these infections are rare. Only your dentist can find them. Other infections are common. They create symptoms you can see or feel.

## What is thrush?

Thrush is an infection on the inside of your mouth. It's caused by a fungus.

Thrush may look like:

- white patches in your mouth that can be wiped off
- a flat, red sore that burns, especially when you eat spicy or salty foods
- cracks in the skin around the corners of your mouth



Many things can cause thrush – using some medicines, wearing dentures, or a change in your health. If you think you see thrush, contact your health care provider.

Thrush can be treated with mouth rinses, pills, or lozenges (pills that melt in your mouth). If thrush is not treated, it can spread down your throat. If this happens, you may need a more complex treatment. You may even need to stay in the hospital. Getting treatment early is best.



## What are mouth sores?

Mouth sores include canker sores and cold sores, or fever blisters. Mouth sores are common, even in people who do not have HIV. But people with HIV can have larger, more painful sores that take longer to heal. If you have a sore that does not go away or heal within 7 to 10 days, see your dentist.

To reduce pain from mouth sores:

- avoid acidic foods like orange juice or tomatoes
- avoid spicy foods like hot sauce
- talk to your dentist about over-the-counter medicines. Your dentist can prescribe medicines to prevent certain types of mouth sores.

# Prevention

Cavities, gum disease, and mouth sores can happen to anyone. The good news is that you can prevent many of these problems.

Follow these easy steps:

- Brush your teeth after each meal – or at least twice a day.
- Use dental floss every day.
- Use mouth rinse every day.
- Ask your dentist if there is a specific mouth rinse you should use.
- Use dry-mouth products for relief for a short time.
- You can help create more saliva and keep your mouth moist by chewing sugar-free gum and drink water instead of sugary drinks.
- Visit your dentist every 6 months for a routine cleaning and a general exam. Do this even if your teeth look normal.

Your dentist can find and remove cavities before they cause you pain. They can also check for gum disease, mouth infections, sores, and cancer. You should visit your dentist even if you have no teeth.



## Check your mouth

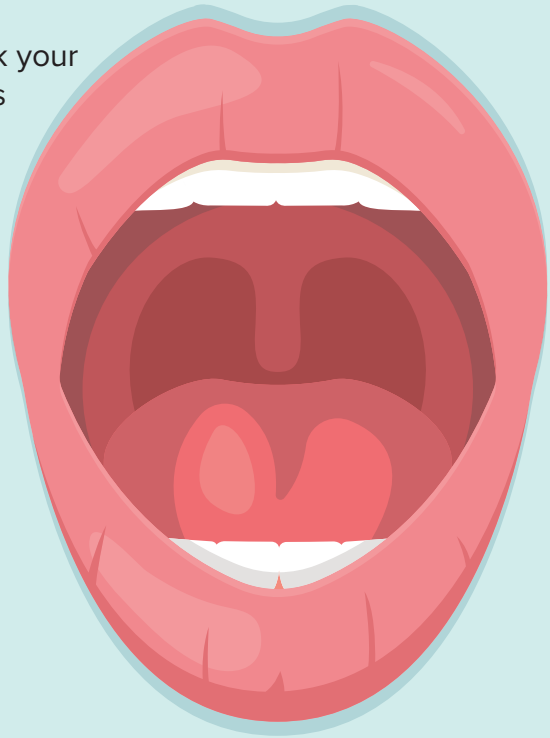
At least once a month check your mouth for signs of infections and sores.

Check your:

- tongue –  
top and bottom
- lips
- gums
- cheeks
- the roof of your mouth

Visit your dentist if you see:

- white, purple, or  
red patches
- painful sores
- bumps
- sores that do not heal  
after 7 to 10 days



## Good nutrition

Healthy eating is important to manage your HIV infection. You need healthy, nutritious food to stay healthy – and for good oral health. Choosing a well-balanced diet helps your body fight HIV.

Avoid foods and drinks that have a lot of sugar. Sugar helps create cavities.

Talk to a member of your health care team about the value of a healthy, balanced diet. Ask for tips about food and drinks that do not cause cavities.





# Visit Your Dentist

Ask your doctor, nurse, or case manager for the name and telephone number of a dentist. They may even be able to make an appointment for you.

## Local Contact Information



Department  
of Health

