

The importance of preventive dental care



Your dental health is linked to your overall health

Poor oral health and hygiene can have a negative impact on your health, especially if you have diabetes or cardiovascular disease or are pregnant. Regular exams and cleanings not only keep your smile happy and healthy but can help maintain your overall health.

According to the University of Michigan's Center for Health Research Transformation:

- Diabetics are **two times** as likely to be diagnosed with moderate or severe periodontitis, compared to non-diabetics.
- Individuals with periodontal disease are **two to three times** more likely to experience a cardiovascular event.
- Women with periodontitis are **two times** more likely to develop gestational diabetes, compared to women without periodontitis.

What happens if dental conditions go untreated?

If left untreated, cavities can become infected, and that infection may spread to other parts of the body. While rare, such infections can be life-threatening. Luckily, keeping cavities at bay is as easy as good oral hygiene and regular dental exams. If a problem does occur, regular dental visits ensure they can be identified and treated early.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- 21% of adults ages 20 to 64 have at least one untreated cavity
- 50% of children ages 6 to 9 have had at least one cavity in their primary or permanent teeth

What to expect at a dental exam

The American Dental Association recommends two dental exams a year, although those with certain chronic conditions, like diabetes, may benefit from additional cleanings. At these appointments, your dentist will review your medical and dental history, order X-rays if needed, examine your teeth for tooth decay and periodontal disease, and perform an oral cancer screening. A hygienist will clean your teeth and give home care instructions. A cleaning typically includes scaling (the removal of plaque and tartar), polishing (the removal of surface stains) and flossing. If any dental conditions are identified, your dentist will work with you to create a treatment plan.

Before and during a dental exam, many patients may feel anxiety or fear. It's important to know that you aren't alone and that your dentist will work with you to make your experience easier. Here are some tips to try if you are fearful of the dentist:

- Share your concerns and any sensitivity or pain to your dental hygienist and dentist before the exam.
- Speak up if you need a break at any point during your visit or experience any pain.
- Distract yourself with fidget devices, stress balls or headphones.
- Perform mindful medication during your exam to help keep yourself relaxed.

Blue Dental Resource Center

Do you have additional questions about oral health or dental hygiene? Find answers to your questions with 24/7 access to our Blue Dental Resource Center. Log in to your member account at bcbsm.com and go to *My Coverage*, then *Dental* to visit the Blue Dental Resource Center and access tools and resources like *Blue Cross Virtual Dental Care*, *Cost Advisor* and dental health and wellness information.



Need to schedule an exam?

- Log in to your Blue Cross member account or visit mibluedentist.com to locate a Tier 1 dentist in your area or access Blue Cross Virtual Dental Care.
- Ask before every visit whether your dentist participates with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. If you need help in determining your dentist's participation, call **1-888-826-8152**.
- Use your Blue Cross member ID card when making an appointment.

