

## Oral Health & Your Immune System

Your oral health can either help or hinder your immune system. Bacteria (both beneficial and harmful ones) thrive in your mouth. Gingivitis is a milder form of bacterial overgrowth that can advance into periodontal disease, which poses more serious risks.

Gum disease has been linked to a number of other conditions, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and even low birth weight. Some experts believe dysfunctions of the oral immune system play a role in the development of autoimmune diseases as well.<sup>8</sup>

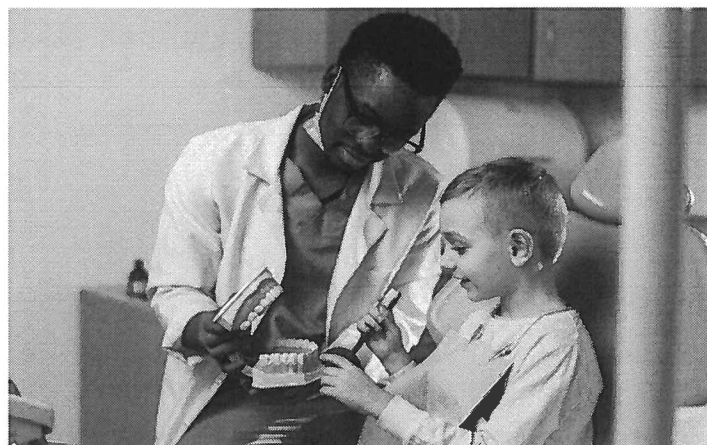
Your mucosal immune system, which appears to operate independently from your more centralized immune system, serves as an additional protective barrier from bacteria, helping to prevent foreign organisms from making their way into your bloodstream.<sup>9</sup>

Here are some things you can do to support good oral health:

**Brush and floss your teeth daily.** Practicing good oral hygiene by brushing and flossing your teeth daily can help reduce levels of harmful bacteria in your mouth.

**Avoid smoking.** Smoking cessation has been shown to reduce the risk of tooth loss as well as the risk of development of periodontitis. (According to the American Dental Association, vaping may be just as risky as cigarette smoking.)<sup>10</sup>

**Eat a wide variety of plants.** Plant-based foods offer a wide variety of phytonutrients that support healthy immune function. There also appears to be a relationship between the bacteria in your mouth and the bacteria in your gut, so eating a plant-based diet may support your immune system in several ways.



**Drink plenty of water.** Water dilutes and neutralizes substances that accumulate in your mouth, reducing the number of harmful bacteria that linger.

**Schedule routine cleanings and check-ups.** Be sure to see your dentist regularly, so you can identify issues early and address them before they become a bigger problem.

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*Practicing good oral hygiene is a simple way that you can help support your immune system.*

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8. <https://doi.org/10.1038/ijos.2014.48>

9. <https://doi.org/10.3390/biology9060131>

10. <https://www.ada.org/en/press-room/news-releases/2019-archives/october/american-dental-association-statement-on-vaping>