

Improving your oral health

In order to improve your oral health, we must first determine your level of risk or likelihood of developing dental disease. To this end, we have developed care guidelines in the areas of caries and periodontal disease based on the most current scientific literature in these areas. The following information will help you learn more about these new programs and how they will affect you.

- Caries (cavities) is a disease caused by bacterial infection. Although the number of people with caries has declined since the 1950s due to fluoridated drinking water, the disease still affects many people. Whether or not you develop caries depends on your diet, oral hygiene, medications you take, and certain medical conditions.
- Periodontal (gum) diseases are bacterial infections that attack gums, bones and ligaments that support the teeth. Whether or not you develop periodontal disease depends on certain medical conditions, family history, oral hygiene and lifestyle factors such as smoking.

HealthPartners dental risk assessment

The HealthPartners Dental staff is committed to working with you to identify your individual level of risk for caries and periodontal disease. Once your risk factors have been assessed, we will recommend specific actions to maintain or improve your oral health.

What will be different?

You will be asked to complete a revised medical and dental history form. In addition, a member of the dental team will talk to you about additional factors that may affect your dental health. This information will help your dentist better determine the degree to which you are at risk for future caries and periodontal disease.

Individualized care plan

If you are at a moderate or high risk level, your dentist will recommend preventive interventions which, if followed, should lower your risk for future disease. If you already have a low risk profile, the dentist will recommend interventions that will help you stay at that level.

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Part of your care plan will emphasize home care therapies. For example, your dentist may prescribe an antibacterial rinse or fluoride to be used at home.

In addition to at-home interventions, the dentist may refer you to other resources within our HealthPartners care system or to your physician. For example, some diseases such as diabetes can affect your oral health.

Future appointments

The frequency with which your provider recommends routine cleaning and examination appointments will be tied to your risk profile. This frequency is consistent with the current research available on this topic. For some patients this may mean we would see you more often to monitor progress in lowering your risk profile. For others, due to their low risk for future disease, fewer visits may be necessary.

Working together, we can decrease the likelihood that you will have cavities or gum disease in the future. This new preventive health program is just one more way in which HealthPartners Dental Clinics are distinguishing themselves as innovators in high quality dental care.

If you have any questions, we encourage you to ask your dental professional.