

# Lifestyle Risks



If you're like most people, the odds are good that your idea of a healthy lifestyle begins and ends with making sure you eat lots of fruit and vegetables, and get exercise as much as you can.

And while both of these factors are crucially important in keeping you fit and healthy, the reality is that your oral health, that is how good a state your teeth and gums are in, has a major effect on your overall health.

Gum disease, for instance, have been linked to a raft of ailments including pneumonia, atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and exacerbated diabetes symptoms.

It's why brushing your teeth 2-3 times a day, flossing daily and seeing your dentist on a regular basis matter as much as they do.

*But that's not where the story ends.*

There are a number of lifestyle habits, such as smoking, drinking and illicit drug use, and stress, which can have a significant effect on how healthy your teeth and gums are, and hence, how healthy you are overall.

Nothing in your body happens in a vacuum and everything you do to your body will inevitably have an effect on your oral health and, sooner or later, on your health overall.

## Smoking

The most obvious effect of smoking is the staining and discolouration of teeth, caused by the nicotine and tar in cigarettes.

But this is just the aesthetic tip of the smoking iceberg.

Smoking has also been linked to a decrease of blood flow to the teeth and gums, bone shrinkage, teeth loss, and an inhibiting of the production of the right kind of saliva, a serious problem given how crucial a role it plays in protecting your teeth from decay.

By far the most dramatic effect of prolonged tobacco use however is oral cancer, which is 9 times likely to occur in smokers than non-smokers.

If you also drink a lot of alcohol, then you're risk of developing cancer of mouth, throat, tongue, lips and salivary glands is even further increased.

## Alcohol

It's not simply the heightened risk of developing oral cancer, serious though that is, that should be a concern for anyone who drinks on a regular basis or to excess.

The sugar and acidity of alcohol are major contributors to teeth erosion, as is the acid reflux which accompanies vomiting, an all too common consequence of a night of heavy drinking.

Compounding the damage is the fact that many people stumble home and go straight to sleep after a big night out, only brushing their teeth the next morning, leaving their mouth unprotected from erosion and decay all night.

Alcohol also dehydrates you, which affects how much saliva your mouth produces, and hence, how much protection your teeth are given.

Drinking lots of water both when you're out partying, and the next day when you're recovering is one way to remedy the effects of excessive alcohol consumption, as is limiting the amount of soft drinks you consume.

## Stress

Life comes with all kinds of high pressure, difficult situations.

The problem is that too much stress can lead to all kinds of problems with your mouth, teeth and gums.

You can end up with mouth ulcers and cold sores, grinding and clenching of teeth which you may not even notice taking place, and at worst, temporomandibular disorders (TMJD), a painful condition affecting the hinge that connects your jaw to your skull.

Stress can also lead you to neglect even the most basic of habits such as healthy eating and brushing and flossing your teeth.