

Thanksgiving Provides a Season to Honor Our Oral Health

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November's red apples and grateful essence quietly drift into our lives, in the wake of a bright orange candy-corn Halloween frenzy. For dentist, Dr. Mark Stites, DDS, this season, culminating at Thanksgiving, allows for introspection and renewal. "Balance is an important aspect of overall health," he suggests. "Our mouth and it's connection to our whole body are paramount for good health. We are our healthiest when we are in balance and that begins with our oral health."

Beginning with the primary concepts of good posture and proper bite, our mouth allows us the capability to offer precious nutrition to our body. The ability to chew our food appears simplistic, however, without it, we become deficient in the basic mechanism that begins the journey of digestion. Our mouth, along with it's teeth, tongue and the necessary systems of salivation, enzyme production and swallowing, work together toward an important goal. Like a calm river carrying precious cargo to a predetermined destination, the journey of necessary fibrous food, important vitamins and the ability to live in harmony with our oral bacteria begins in the mouth.

Former US Surgeon General, C. Everett Koop, MD, stated that "You're not healthy unless you have good oral health." Recent studies have shown increasing evidence connecting periodontal disease to declining health, specifically the increased incidence of stroke, diabetes and heart disease. Other reports show a connection between poor oral health and an increase in pneumonia in our older population. As plaque and bacteria increase on the teeth and gums causing gingivitis and periodontal diseases, they can move into the bloodstream spreading problematic inflammation throughout the body. The heart, brain and lungs can, therefore, be the recipients of these 'traveling' bacteria. Since what happens in your mouth affects your overall health, teeth brushing, flossing and regular visits to your dentist continue to be important weapons in the fight against tooth decay and gum inflammation. According to Dr. Stites, there are some gentle additions to this arsenal that can be easily incorporated into your daily regimen.



Continuing the original theme of balance and harmony, Dr. Stites offers a few recommendations to help lower body inflammation, including that which exists in the mouth.

1. **Choose foods higher in nutrition and lower in sugar.** Specifically, decrease high fructose corn syrup, hidden in a large variety of products including soda, salad dressings and jellies. It appears obvious that high sugar levels increase tooth decay, but it also increases the body's propensity to develop diabetes. If nothing else, sugar is a cell irritant and the promoter of wrinkles.
2. **Increase Omega-3 fish oils** in the form of fish, nuts, certain eggs or supplements. Omega-3's have been reported to decrease inflammation in the body.
3. **Add a small glass of pomegranate juice** to your diet each day. An active ingredient in this fruit possesses strong anti-bacterial properties and has been shown to decrease inflammation in patients with periodontal disease.
4. **Consider using xylitol, stevia or erythritol as substitutes for sugar.** Studies have shown that Xylitol is effective in reducing tooth decay as the teeth become slick and bacteria have a harder time sticking to the surface. Be careful, however, because this product can also have a laxative effect.
5. **Vitamin C** can be an effective addition in the struggle against inflammation. Consider adding 2,000 mg. to your daily regimen.

According to Dr. Stites, good oral routines can lead to the prevention of dental and systemic disease. "Through honoring the amazing capacity of the mouth, we increase our ability to obtain and maintain total body health," he offered. "Conversely, if we are ill, it too, shows itself in our mouth through inflammation in our gums and other oral signs. So insisting on good dental care is an important part of our journey towards good overall health."

Dr. Stites carries this message throughout his extensive work in his chosen field of dentistry. His empathetic style is appreciated by his patients who understand his desire to treat their dental needs in a synergistic fashion. Healing issues in the mouth can lead to positive total body effects.

As Thanksgiving approaches and we quietly devise our list of that which we are grateful, contemplate adding our wondrous mouth to that inventory. Dr. Stites challenges us to renew our efforts to offer this important oral entrance to our body the healthy support and respect that it deserves. Doing so will help to create internal balance and harmony, beginning with good oral health.

Dr. Mark Stites, DDS, has provided the Naples community with outstanding dental care for over 30 years. His extensive awareness of the connection between oral health and total body well-being has provided the basis for outstanding oral care for over 2,000 patients since 1974.

Dr. Stites and his professional office staff offer the ultimate combination of care, combining the most modern dental techniques and holistic concepts in a balanced environment. Their care creates a foundation of respect and the potential for inner, as well as, structural health. Call 239-263-2636 for more information.