

True or False?

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Poor oral health can cause serious health conditions, such as stroke, heart disease, and diabetes.



For more information on your oral health, contact the Massachusetts Dental Society at **(800) 342–8747** or visit *www.massdental.org*.

## How important is your oral health to you?

If you're like the 80 percent of respondents in a recent survey conducted by the American Dental Association (ADA) and Crest and Oral-B, you believe that taking care of your mouth, teeth, and gums is absolutely necessary. Surprisingly though, only one-third (33 percent) of respondents believe they take "excellent" care of their oral health. So, when it comes to comparing your oral health to that of other Americans, do you talk the talk or walk the walk?

The survey of 1,000 Americans ages 18 and older focused on the public's perceptions of their oral health; Americans' knowledge of effective and essential oral health care habits; oral health habits among young Americans; and the psychological benefits of a healthy smile.

Some of the results are very telling. For instance, more than half (55 percent) of respondents agreed that the smile is a person's most important physical attribute, but more than one-third did not realize that a beautiful smile is not always a healthy smile and can in fact mask underlying problems. Thirty-three percent of those surveyed thought that a little bleeding from brushing is normal, when actually it is not and could be a sign of periodontal disease. One in three (33 percent) were unaware that periodontal disease needs to be treated because it will not go away on its own. And 37 percent didn't know that poor oral health has been associated with other serious overall health conditions such as stroke, heart disease, and diabetes.

## There's More to a Smile Than You Think

Survey participants realized that a healthy smile is not only essential to overall physical health, but it can also affect self-esteem and success in life. Only one in three (37 percent) said that they were completely happy with their own smile, while nearly one in five said that they avoid having their picture taken because they are self-conscious about their smile. Additionally, while many feel that a smile is the most attractive feature in another person, the majority (73 percent) are adamant that no matter how nice a person's smile is, yellowed teeth ruin the effect.

When it comes to oral health habits, the survey found that men and women differ in their attitudes toward their oral health. According to the results, 86 percent of women brush their teeth twice or more a day, while only 66 percent of men do so. However, the avoidance of flossing knows no gender lines: Only 49 percent of those surveyed said they floss their teeth one or more times a day, and 10 percent said they never floss at all. Regular brushing (at least twice a day) with a fluoride toothpaste and daily flossing are the two best ways to maintain good oral health, which means that according to this survey, more Americans need to step up their game.

So, Word of Mouth readers, where do you rate your oral health? If you follow the oral health tips you see regularly in this publication or on the MDS Web site, you should be well above average. •