



Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

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Dental Care Will Improve Your Health

A growing body of research suggests that periodontal disease (gum disease) may play a role in a variety of health problems. These include diabetes, respiratory illness, pregnancy complications, and heart disease.

Taking care of your dental health is an important part of managing your overall health. Whether you have your own teeth or have teeth that you can take out, good oral hygiene is important. Regular visits to the dentist and dental hygienist will help you to maintain your dental health.

For those with their own teeth, daily oral hygiene is a must. The most effective way to keep your teeth healthy is to manually remove the bacteria on the teeth with brushing and flossing. A soft toothbrush with a small brush head is recommended for daily brushing. The small brush head will allow you to brush each tooth individually and the soft brush will not damage the gum tissues. Any type of floss will work, as long as you use it!

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If you have removable dentures or partials, these also need to be cleaned every day. We recommend that you remove your dentures/partial at night to let your mouth rest. Wearing them all the time is like wearing your shoes 24 hours a day!



If you are unable to leave the dentures/partial out at night, pick a time during the day when they can soak in a denture cleaner and then be

brushed. When you have the dentures/partial out of your mouth, they should be cleaned and rinsed thoroughly. If you need to use adhesive with your dentures/partial, you should be sure to clean the old adhesive off of the dentures/partial before you put on the new adhesive. Be sure to also get rid of any extra adhesive on the inside of your mouth. Use gauze or a toothbrush to remove adhesive. Do not use facial tissue!

One of the more common side effects of many prescription medicines is dry mouth. Dry mouth is a big concern when it comes to keeping your mouth healthy. If your mouth is dry, there is no saliva to move bacteria off your teeth. Bacteria that sit on your teeth for a long time can cause cavities and other problems. You can buy over-the-counter products to help relieve dry mouth. Be sure to ask your primary provider or dental provider for tips on helping you with this.

A part of your mouth that often is ignored is your tongue. It is important to clean your tongue on a regular basis. Due to the texture of your tongue, bacteria stick to it. Brushing your tongue is a good way to clean it. Many toothbrushes now have ridges on the back of the brush to clean your tongue. You can also use the bristles of the brush. Be sure not to stick the brush too far back or it will make you gag!

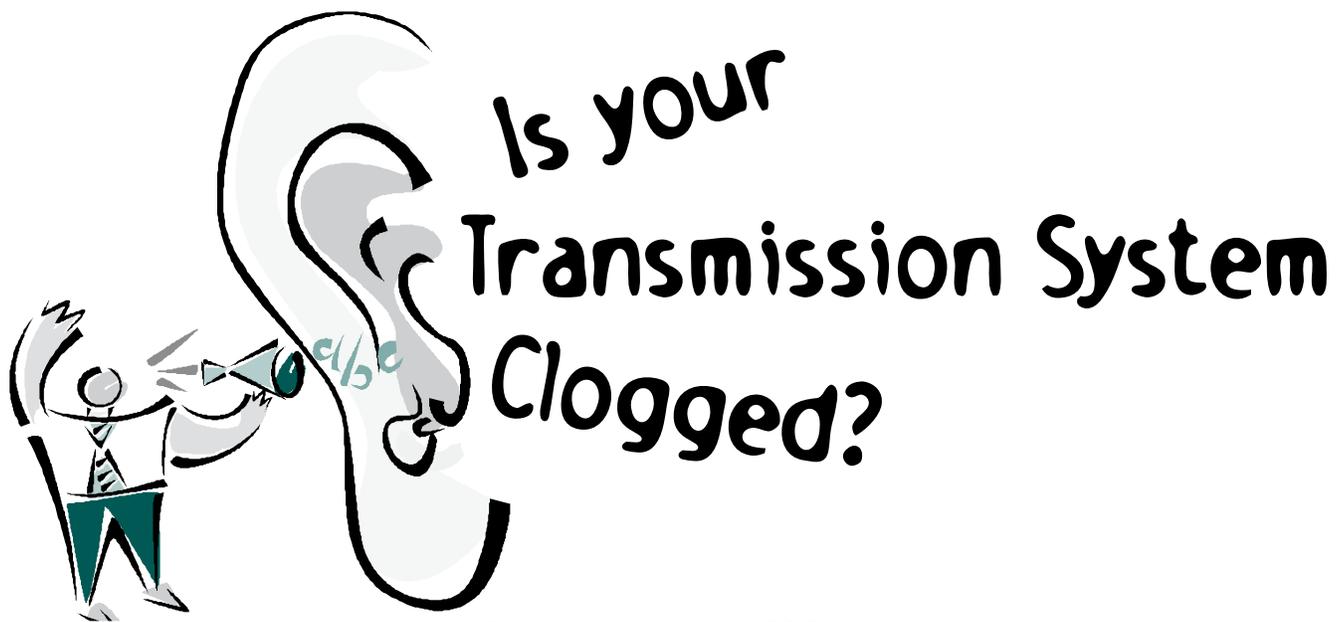
Dental rinses are a good way to finish your oral hygiene care. But they are not a replacement for brushing and flossing. If you have your own teeth you may want to use a mouth rinse with fluoride in it to protect your teeth. Other mouth rinses are available. We recommend antibacterial rinses. They help reduce the amount of bacteria in your mouth after you have brushed and flossed. Be sure to stay away from those that contain a high percentage of alcohol. Alcohol in a mouth rinse will make your mouth dry and can possibly contribute to more problems down the road.

Remember: healthy teeth are an important part of a healthy body. Taking care of your dental needs is just as important as taking care of your medical needs.

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No, I am not talking about your car. I am talking about your ears! Earwax can clog your ears the same way dirt can clog your car engine.

Glands in the outer third of our ear canal produce earwax. Why? Earwax traps dust and dirt particles and keeps them from reaching your eardrum.

Most of the time, the earwax builds up, dries out, and then comes tumbling out of the ear, carrying dirt and debris with it.

Texture and color of earwax:

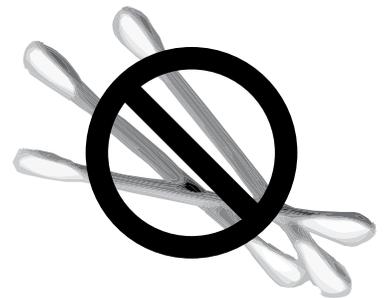
- Semi-liquid, semi-transparent, and odorless
- Changes from light/clear to black
- Changes from soft to hard with time

Earwax comes from the natural process of the ear cleaning itself. There is no way to prevent it.

Conditions that can lead to a build up of earwax:

- Stenosis (narrowing of the ear canal)
- Using cotton swabs
- Hearing aids
- Aging (collapsible ear canals due to loss of elasticity in ears)
- Hypothyroidism (leads to thicker earwax)
- Radiation treatments (leads to drier earwax)

Your ear canal may become blocked when your attempts to clean the ear push earwax deeper into the ear canal. Earwax blockage can cause mild to moderate hearing loss. This would make it difficult for the person to hear “loud” speech.



Problems that can occur when there is too much earwax:

- Tinnitus (head noises or ringing of the ears)
- Vertigo (spinning sensation)
- Itching
- Earache(s)
- Outer ear infection(s)
- Hearing loss

So what should you do if you suspect that you have impacted earwax? Talk to your primary care provider. Your provider can look into your ears with an otoscope to check if you do have a build up of earwax and then pick the best method to remove it.

Do not attempt to remove earwax with a Q-tip, tweezers, bobby pin, or any other type of instrument. This may pack the earwax even deeper and rupture the eardrum. This can cause permanent hearing loss, dizziness, tinnitus, and ear fullness!

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1. American Academy of Audiology (AAA), on-line interactive course, June 18, 2003
2. "Manual of Otolaryngology, Diagnosis and Therapy" by Marshall Strome, MD, James Kelly, MD, & Marvin Fried, MD (1985)

Looking for a different way to decrease your pain or stress level?

How about a safe, low impact way to increase your strength, endurance and balance? Try Tai Chi (pronounced "tie chee") !

Tai Chi is a gentle form of martial arts. It is similar to simple stretching and yoga. It can benefit the heart, ease arthritis symptoms, increase leg strength, and improve balance and endurance. Mood disorders may also benefit by reduction of tension and anxiety.

Tai chi can be performed in a basic session of 15-20 minutes and at any level of difficulty. You need not worry about your performance or perfection of technique. Each movement builds on another – the value comes from practicing. Best of all – THERE IS NO PAIN!

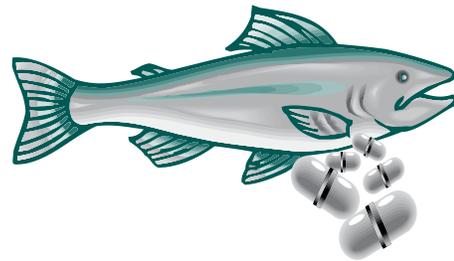
Many local recreation departments and health clubs offer classes. Check Tai Chi out!



Food for Your Heart - Omega-3s

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VA Dietetic Intern

Growing up, my mother always told me that eating fish would make me smarter. I'm not sure if this is true, but I have learned that fish, in fact, may be good for your heart. Certain fish have the type of "good fat" called omega-3.



Research has shown that eating foods containing omega-3, as part of a healthy diet, can help reduce the risk of developing heart disease.

Omega-3s can help to reduce:

- ♥ High blood pressure
- ♥ High triglycerides
- ♥ Inflammation in arteries that can lead to heart disease.

Other research suggests that omega-3s may also help to:

- ♥ Prevent stroke
- ♥ Protect against an eye disease called macular degeneration
- ♥ Reduce the risk of getting certain types of cancer (including breast, colon, and prostate)
- ♥ Prevent bone loss
- ♥ Decrease flare ups of rheumatoid arthritis
- ♥ Decrease depression and anxiety

The two best omega-3s are EPA and DHA. These are found mostly in cold-water oily fish such as wild salmon, cod, herring, mackerel, anchovies and sardines. Other types of omega-3s are also found in plant sources, such as flaxseed oil, canola oil, walnuts and green vegetables. These sources, while valuable, are not as helpful as those found in fish.

Today, you can buy over-the-counter omega-3 pills. They usually contain fish oil or flaxseed oil. Food companies are also beginning to add omega-3s to some foods such as eggs, vegetable oil spreads, cereals, yogurt, cheese and milk. To gain the most benefit, it is best to choose a product with “excellent source of EPA and DHA” on the label.

How much omega-3 do you need? A positive benefit has been found with 500 to 1,000 milligrams per day. The American Heart Association now recommends all adults eat a variety of fish, mainly oily fish, at least twice a week. A three-ounce portion provides an average of 500 milligrams of omega-3. Talk to your doctor before taking omega-3 pills, as they may interact with some prescription medicine.

Although there is much support for the benefits of omega-3s, it should be only one part of a balanced healthy diet. So, my mother may have not been accurate in saying that eating fish will make you smarter. However, it is clear that adding omega-3s to your diet is a smart choice.

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“Fish and Omega-3 Fatty Acids. AHA recommendation” <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4632>

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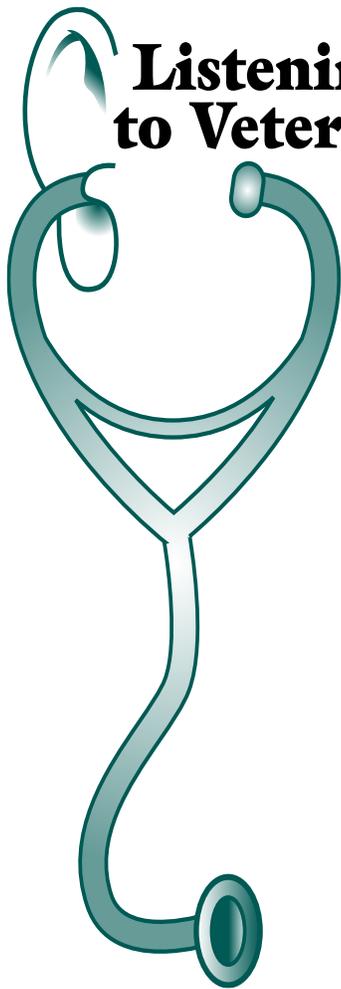
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/patient-fishoil.html

HELP A FELLOW VET

**Always CALL to
cancel or
reschedule**

**if you can't keep
your appointment!**

 Department of
Veterans Affairs



Should I Take Fish Oil Capsules?

Fish oil comes in a liquid filled capsule. Your provider will tell you how much to take and how often. It can range from 1 to 4 grams daily. Take the capsules with food or milk to help avoid an upset stomach.

Possible side effects include a fishy aftertaste or “fishy burp,” unusual taste in your mouth, nausea/vomiting, heartburn, loose stools, constipation or increased sweating or body odor.

Tell your provider if you have diabetes or are allergic to fish. Also tell your provider if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Fatty fish from *dietary* (food) sources can contain significant amount of toxins, such as mercury. Tests have NOT shown fish oil *capsules* to contain significant amounts of mercury. But there is also not a lot of information about what happens when a pregnant or breastfeeding woman takes fish oil.

Answered by:

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Always tell your provider about all prescriptions or over-the-counter or herbal medicines and supplements you are taking.

- Be sure your provider knows if you are taking blood thinners. For example: aspirin, clopidogrel (Plavix), ASA/dipyridamole (Aggrenox), dipyridamole (Persantine), enoxaparin (Lovnox), heparin, ticlopidine (Ticlid), or warfarin (Coumadin).
- If you take blood pressure medicine, talk to your provider before taking fish oil capsules. Fish oil can affect your blood pressure.
- Tell your provider if you use herbals such as angelica, clove, danshen, garlic, giner, ginkgo, Panax ginseng, red clover, turmeric, willow or vitamin E.

Store fish oil capsules in a closed container. Keeping them in the freezer may reduce the “fishy burps.” Keep capsules away from heat, moisture and direct light. Keep them out of reach of children. Be sure to throw the medicine away when it is past the expiration date.

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Important note: We are not able to mail this newsletter to you. It can be found in waiting rooms of your VA Medical Center and outpatient clinics.

You can also subscribe to the electronic version of this newsletter by going to www.visn12.med.va.gov/subscribe.htm



Your best source for information about your health will always be your health care team. We hope this newsletter will encourage you to ask questions about your health concerns.

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or Idea for Future Articles**

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