

Benefits Spotlight

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Dental Health on the Go: Tips for RAGBRAI Riders

RAGBRAI is among Iowa's greatest state-wide summer traditions—filled with camaraderie, community and not to mention, great exercise. Whether you're riding one leg or tackling the full river-to-river race, don't neglect your dental health during the event.

"Riders should continue to maintain good oral hygiene habits while on the ride," said Dr. Jeffrey Chaffin, Dental Director for Delta Dental of Iowa. "The same oral hygiene practices they have at home should be performed while on the road."

"When I was in the Army, a physician friend saw me flossing out 'in the field' and asked why I would do that," Dr. Chaffin continued. "My response was that I do it every day at home, why wouldn't I do it here?"

Dr. Chaffin said that special occasions often throw people out of their regular habits, but oral health needs to be maintained every day. Fortunately, the essential dental toolkit—a travel toothbrush, toothpaste and floss—is easy to pack, practically weightless and takes up minimal space.

In addition to brushing and flossing twice a day during the ride, Dr. Chaffin said to make sure you have clean hands before flossing.

Maintaining dental health is one thing—but what about preventing a potential oral health emergency? A fall off your bike could cause serious dental damage. Should RAGBRAI riders consider wearing a mouthguard as an added precaution? Dr. Chaffin said it is generally not necessary.

"Most riders do not need a mouthguard," he said. "But for those who tend to clench during strenuous exercise, a custom fit mouthguard could go a long way to prevent oral discomfort."

When oral health habits slip for a few days, a domino effect tends to follow. This RAGBRAI, stay on course for the race and for your dental health by packing a travel dental kit for your ride.

How Ocean and Pool Water Affect Your Teeth

Ah, swimming: The quintessential way to soak up summer fun. Whether you're splashing in your neighborhood pool or taking a coastal vacation for a dip in the ocean, the last thing you're likely wondering is how the water affects your teeth. But pool and ocean water can impact your oral health—and you might be surprised to learn how.

Pool water

Chlorinated pool water can affect your teeth by wearing down your enamel and increasing tooth sensitivity—especially if the water has a pH level below seven. Frequent pool-goers (those who swim more than six hours weekly) might also notice that their pearly whites aren't so bright. It's true: Chlorine can dim your white smile. Fortunately, your dentist can share ways to prevent chlorine from staining your teeth that don't involve you having to sacrifice precious summer days at the pool.

It's also worth noting that one of the biggest pool dangers to your mouth exists outside the water. Don't run on slippery pool decks and nearby surfaces, as a fall can chip a tooth.

Ocean water

The deeper you dive, the more the ocean can affect your teeth—but it's not so much the water as the pressure. In fact, scuba divers may experience a condition called "tooth squeeze." The change in pressure from traversing too deep into the ocean can cause pain throughout your mouth, and it can damage fillings and crowns.

But, it's not all bad news: The salty ocean water can be good for your teeth. If ocean water gets in your mouth, swish it around—salt promotes healing for sore throats and mouth sores (but make sure to spit it out...you'll thank us).

Wherever you swim, don't forget to take off any removable dental devices, like retainers, before hopping in the water to avoid losing them.

