

Benefits Spotlight

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Mouth-friendly Fall Foods

Fall is a season packed with fun and delicious traditions like pumpkin patches, apple orchards and—as any lowan knows—corn mazes. When you see pumpkins popping up around nearly every corner and smell warm cinnamon wafting through the air, it's unmistakably autumn.

Fall also has its share of signature foods—and many are excellent for your oral health. Here are our top picks for mouth-friendly fall fare.

Apples: Nature's Toothbrush

Apples are autumn's star food when it comes to dental health. Eaten raw, apples have a crunch that helps clean your teeth by stimulating saliva and scrubbing debris off your teeth. In short, raw apples act essentially like a toothbrush. They're also high in fiber and water, which also helps keep your teeth clean between brushes.



Pumpkin: A Nutrient Powerhouse

While sipping a sugary pumpkin coffee drink has become almost a rite of passage each fall, it's best to enjoy pumpkin in its natural state by roasting it, pureeing it in a soup or baking it into a quick bread. Pumpkin is packed with nutrients that support your oral health, such as magnesium (wards off tooth decay) and vitamin A (supports enamel and helps heal damaged gums). Pumpkin seeds are also a mouth-friendly choice, as they contain fiber, protein, phosphorus and calcium—a nutrient mix that helps strengthen teeth.

Go Nuts this Fall

As the temperatures dip, roasted nuts are a warming and satisfying snack that also happens to be great for your oral health. Nuts are low in sugar and high in protein (always a great combination for your mouth)—just make sure they are roasted raw and not covered in sugar.

Cranberries: The Bacteria Blocker

Cranberries are among the top foods for your oral health, as they contain substances that prevent bacteria in your mouth from causing tooth decay while supporting the good bacteria in your mouth. One important note about cranberries is that many cranberry products contain added sugar to offset cranberry's natural tartness. To reap the oral health benefits, always opt for products that contain 100% cranberry with no added sugar. A cup of hot 100% cranberry juice with seasonal spices (like clove and orange peel) is an excellent way to enjoy the flavors of the season while supporting your dental health.

So pack in as many pumpkin patch and apple orchard visits as you can while the season sticks around. With so many oral-health-boosting foods in abundance this time of year, there's nothing holding you back from enjoying all this season has to offer.

Sources

<https://bestrenodontists.com/fall-food-favorites-teeth/>

<https://www.karmazidental.com/2018/10/08/fall-food-favorites/>

How Mental Health Affects Your Oral Health

You may know that several medical conditions, such as diabetes, have a direct effect on your oral health, but did you know that mental illness is also linked to dental problems?

Research has shown an association between common mood disorders, including depression and anxiety, and poor dental health. With approximately 600,000 lowans living with mental illness—that's about 20 percent of the population—it's important to understand this connection and what you can do about it.

Why Does Mental Illness Harm Dental Health?

Many factors contribute to the link between mental illness and declining oral health. One factor is the stress associated with anxiety and depression. Stress is produced by the hormone cortisol, and this hormone suppresses your immune system as it increases. A weakened immune system ups your risk of developing several oral health conditions, including gingivitis and gum disease. Stress is also linked to tooth grinding, which can wear down your teeth and cause jaw pain.

Treatments for mental illness may also work against your oral health. Some anxiety and depression medications cause dry mouth, which encourages bacteria, food particles and plaque to remain on the teeth, which promotes tooth decay.

Another important consideration is that people struggling with mental and emotional health may fall out of their daily at-home dental care routine, brushing or flossing less frequently than they should. In addition, certain lifestyle habits associated with mental illness can harm oral health, including smoking and eating an unhealthy diet. Mental illness may also prevent some people from keeping their twice yearly dentist visits.

Simple Steps to Managing Dental Health

Mental and emotional disorders can take a toll on your quality of life, but you can prevent them from harming your oral health through simple, daily at-home dental care. Brushing twice daily and flossing once a day will keep your teeth clean and prevent many oral health problems.

It's also important to keep your twice-yearly dental visits. In addition to a thorough cleaning and check-up, these visits provide you the opportunity to speak honestly with your dentist about how your mental health has affected your dental health. Your dentist can share ways to help you maintain your oral health while managing your mental illness, especially if you're using medications that may increase your risk for dental health issues.

Preserving your total health—mental, emotional and physical—can be challenging, but getting into an at-home care routine and seeing your dentist twice yearly will help keep your teeth and mouth healthy for years to come.

Sources

<https://namiowa.org/about-mental-illness/facts-figures/>