

## Oral Wellness Newsletter

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## Stressed out? Relax and improve oral health

Stress is all too common these days. On top of responsibilities at home and work, the pandemic has taken a mental toll on us. Not only can stress cause headaches, stomachaches and anxiety, it also can cause many dental problems.

Signs of stress are irritability, restlessness, worrying, tension in the neck and shoulders and depression. You also might have issues with motivation, sleeping, crying and changes in eating or drinking. Clenching or grinding your teeth can lead to jaw or tooth pain.

### Reducing stress can help avoid:

**Gum disease** - Inflamed gum tissue is caused by the [bacteria in plaque](#), but stress can contribute.<sup>[1]</sup> It can weaken the immune system, making it easier for gum disease to take hold. Stressed-out people may also [neglect their oral hygiene](#) – the main cause of gum disease.<sup>[2]</sup> Signs include red, swollen, sore and bleeding gums. Gum disease can cause tooth loss, so it's important to seek treatment.

**Cavities** - When we're stressed, we tend to [eat unhealthy foods](#), such as candy and cookies.<sup>[1]</sup> The high sugar levels in these goodies feed the acid-producing bacteria in the mouth, which eat away at teeth to cause cavities. Cavities can lead to toothaches, tooth loss or even serious infections such as abscesses.

**Canker Sores** – Emotional stress can trigger canker sores, which can form on oral soft tissues, including the insides of the cheeks, the gums and even under the tongue. These painful sores can make it hard to eat or drink<sup>[3]</sup>. *See article below.*

**Oral Cancer** - Stress can sometimes cause us to choose unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as smoking and drinking alcohol, that increase the risk of oral cancer. Alcohol and tobacco use are the [biggest risk factors for oral cancer](#). Sores that don't heal, lumps on the oral tissues or even a sore throat can be [signs of oral cancer](#). [4]

**Tips to manage your stress:**

- Take breaks during the day
- Find ways to relax, like yoga or meditation
- Eat a well-balanced diet
- Limit alcohol, caffeine and tobacco use
- Exercise regularly
- Develop a routine
- Get enough sleep
- Write down your goals and priorities
- Talk to a counselor



## Fun in the sun may cause canker sores

Most of us enjoy summer days, but for some people, sun exposure can trigger the familiar burn or tingle of a canker sore or cold sore. These mouth ulcers can appear for many reasons, including stress, food allergies, mouth injuries, vitamin or mineral deficiencies and hormonal changes.

**Canker sores** are small spots with a white or yellow center that appear on the tongue, mouth, gums or inner cheeks or lips. Although not contagious, they're painful and can make it hard to eat and drink. Canker sores turn gray as they heal, which takes one to three weeks.

**Cold sores**, also called fever blisters, are contagious and caused by the Herpes Simplex Virus.[5] These fluid-filled blisters appear on or near the mouth or on the face and usually heal in one to two weeks. Over-the-counter cold sore ointments may help the sore heal faster. If sun triggers an outbreak for you, wearing sunscreen may help prevent them in the future.

**Carry over-the-counter pain relievers** – Keep ibuprofen, acetaminophen or naproxen in your purse, glove box or luggage. These NSAIDs can temporarily reduce pain and swelling due to toothaches or other issues.

**For more relief, you can try:**

- Over-the-counter “numbing” medications
- SLS-free toothpaste
- Alcohol-free rinse
- A cool, damp cloth
- Prescription antiviral drugs from your dentist
- Sugar-free gum or lozenges
- Avoiding spicy foods, tomatoes and other citrus fruits

It’s not unusual to find a white patch, spot or sore on your tongue or gums, but it could be something other than a canker or cold sore. **Oral thrush** causes white patches on the tongue and in the mouth and is more likely if you’re taking antibiotics or have a weak immune system, diabetes or HIV.

If you have any of these symptoms, see your dentist or doctor.



## Wise pain relief after wisdom teeth surgery

Wisdom teeth removal involves bone surgery, but it’s fairly routine. Unless there are complications, most teens don’t have much pain at all afterwards. And any tenderness or stiff jaw muscles should only last a few days.

Over-the-counter medications can ease your teen’s discomfort. But your doctor may have prescribed a strong opioid pain medicine, too. Before you fill it, here’s important safety information to consider.

### Try OTCs first

Over-the-counter medications like Advil and Tylenol are safer and more effective. Research shows that a combination of both provides better pain relief than prescription narcotics.<sup>[6]</sup> And since ibuprofen is an anti-inflammatory, it also reduces swelling.

### **Consider the risk of opioids**

Opioids are very powerful and can be addictive, especially among teenagers. High-schoolers who take prescription opioid painkillers are 33% more likely to abuse opioids later in life. And 37% of seniors who take opioids for fun start with their leftover pills.

### **Fill a limited prescription**

Soreness should only last a day or two, so you don't need a 30-day supply of opioids. When your doctor writes the prescription, explain you'd prefer just a few pills. And make sure your teen takes them exactly as your doctor prescribed.

### **Don't keep leftover opioids**

Over half of opioids prescribed for pain relief aren't used.<sup>[7]</sup> And most people store them in the medicine cabinet. But leftover opioids can tempt friends or siblings, so don't keep them within easy reach – 70% of teens who abuse drugs get them from home.

### **Dispose of pills properly**

The [Federal Drug Administration](#) (FDA) recommends promptly flushing unused opioids down the toilet – unless there's a drug take-back program available immediately. Many communities have periodic take-back events. And some pharmacies offer disposal solutions, too. So, make sure to ask the pharmacist when you pick up your prescription.



## **Kids get arthritis, too**

If you thought only seniors experience the pain and physical debilitation of arthritis, think again. Nearly 300,000 kids and teens under the age of 16 suffer from juvenile arthritis (JA), an autoimmune disease that comes in many forms, from juvenile lupus that affects joints and organs, to juvenile scleroderma that causes the skin to harden.<sup>[8]</sup>

The most common type of juvenile arthritis causes joint pain and inflammation in the hands, wrists and elbows – side effects that can hinder your child's oral health.<sup>[8]</sup>

### **How arthritis affects oral care**

If your child's hands are stiff and sore, it can be hard to hold the toothbrush handle or wrangle dental floss between teeth. Try buying a large handle you can add on to the toothbrush to make it easier to grip, or an electric toothbrush that'll scrub teeth automatically without a lot of effort on junior's part. You can also find toothbrushes with multiple brush heads that reduce the need to twist the arm or wrist.

And for getting between teeth squeaky clean, try a dental flosser with an ergonomic handle (it looks like a shaver), but comes with snap-on, replaceable heads.

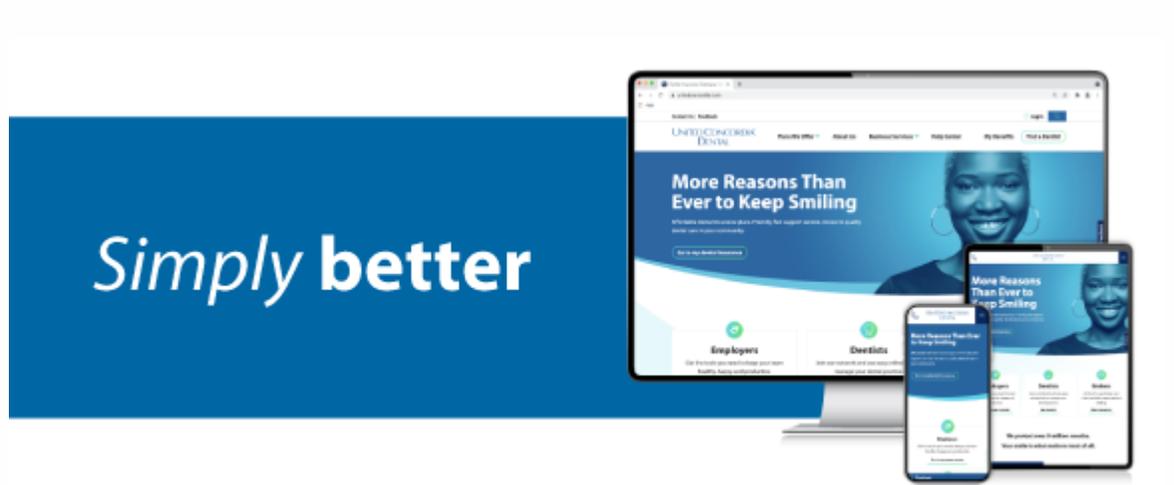
Juvenile arthritis can also affect the mouth and jaw, making it harder open up to brush and floss, and to chew food.[8] More than half of kids with juvenile arthritis have jaw issues.[8]

#### Symptoms of juvenile arthritis:

- Sudden rash or fever
- Stiff, swollen joints
- Limping or clumsiness
- Swelling in the lymph nodes

If you suspect your child may have juvenile arthritis, talk to your pediatrician.

[Learn more about juvenile arthritis](#)



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