

On behalf of CIGNA Dental & Vision Care, enjoy this issue of *CIGNA Healthful Hints*. We look forward to keeping you apprised of developments in the health arena and welcome your comments.

## **CIGNA Healthful Hints**

January – March 2008

This edition includes the following *healthful hints*:

- **Dental Floss: The Stepchild of Oral Hygiene**
- **Making the First Meal of the Day Count**
- **Making the Most of Your Dental Plan**
- **Keeping Good Eye Health in Sight**
- **Healthy Smiles for Healthy Hearts**

**Dental Floss: The Stepchild of Oral Hygiene** – If you had a nickel for every time your dentist told you to floss, you might have enough for the down payment on a car. Ignore that advice and you may wish you had that money to cover the immediate and long-term consequences of not flossing. According to the American Academy of Periodontology (AAP) more than one in three people over age 30, or 35.7 million Americans, has periodontitis. Also known as gum disease, this chronic bacterial infection affects the gums and bone supporting the teeth. If gum disease progresses too far, you can lose your teeth. On top of that, mounting research has linked gum disease to complications for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, pre-term birth, and other health issues.

“The good news about gum disease is that it is preventable and treatable,” said Dr. Marjorie Jeffcoat, dean of the School of Dental Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and a member of CIGNA Dental’s Clinical Advisory Panel. “To prevent gum disease you need to brush twice a day and floss once a day to get rid of the bacterial plaque, which is a sticky, colorless film that constantly forms on the teeth and can eventually cause gum disease. If you don’t do a good job of removing plaque, it can spread below the gum line damaging the bone and leading to tooth loss. And if you’ve been diagnosed with gum disease, in addition to brushing and flossing, it’s important to follow your dentist’s recommendation for treatment and maintenance.”

While brushing removes plaque on the surface of your teeth, flossing is important because it removes the plaque that hides between your teeth. Here are tips on flossing your teeth:

- Use about 18 inches of floss and wrap most of it around your middle finger with the remaining on the other finger on the opposite hand.
- Gently work the floss between the teeth toward the gums. Curve the floss around each tooth into a U-shape and gently slide it under the gum line.
- Move the floss firmly up and down several times to scrape off the plaque. Popping the floss in and out between the teeth without scraping will not remove much plaque and can hurt your gums.
- Repeat the same method on all of your teeth and don’t forget to floss the backside of your last tooth.

“Along with brushing and flossing you should eat a healthy diet and limit snacks between meals,” says Dr. Jeffcoat. “Regular dental visits are also important because the signs of gum disease may not always be noticeable. These signs include red, tender, or swollen gums; gums that bleed when you brush; dark red or receding gums; bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth; and loose teeth.”

For more information on flossing and gum disease, visit [www.perio.org](http://www.perio.org), [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org) or take this link <http://www.cigna.com/healthinfo/hw144414.html> to the CIGNA site.

**Making the First Meal of the Day Count** – Your morning routine is hectic enough. Most days it can be a challenge to eat a healthy breakfast, let alone any breakfast at all. Add children to the picture and things get even busier. Taking a few extra minutes to make sure your children eat breakfast not only improves their energy level and their ability to concentrate in school, it may also reduce their risk for cavities. A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that children who skip breakfast and don’t eat their fruits and vegetables have a higher chance of developing cavities than children who practice better eating habits.<sup>1</sup>

“Studies have found that children who eat breakfast consume less sugary snacks during the day,” said Dr. Thomas Floyd, a pediatric dentist and member of CIGNA Dental’s Clinical Advisory Panel. “Children two to five years old who skip breakfast are four times more likely to get cavities than children who eat breakfast regularly. In addition, children who don’t get the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables a day increase their risk of developing cavities by more than three times.”

So what are some quick and healthy breakfast ideas? Dr. Floyd suggests the following ideas for breakfast that include a fruit, a grain and a protein:

- Raisin toast with peanut butter, a banana and some low-fat milk
- Slice of cheese melted on whole wheat bread, berries and low-fat milk
- Ready-to-eat cereal, fresh fruit and low-fat milk
- Quick-to-cook hot cereal, cinnamon applesauce and low-fat milk
- Scrambled eggs, orange juice, whole wheat toast and low-fat milk

To learn more about healthy food choices, visit the CIGNA website to read about the Healthy Kids Challenge and CIGNA at [http://www.cigna.com/about\\_us/community/healthy\\_kids.html](http://www.cigna.com/about_us/community/healthy_kids.html).

**Making the Most of Your Dental Plan** – For some, this New Year will mean membership with a new dental insurance plan. So how can you be sure you make the most of your dental plan in the New Year?

With a new dental plan, you may have a handful of questions. For example, can you continue to see the same dentist you have been going to? How do you pick a new dentist? Will you receive a new identification card? Will you have a co-pay when you visit the dentist?

“Most dental insurance plans have a website where members can find answers to commonly asked questions such as how to select a new dentist,” said Dr. Miles Hall, chief clinical director for CIGNA Dental. “In addition to some of the basic questions, be sure to find out about online tools that can help with assessing your dental health and even estimating your costs for necessary dental treatments or procedures.”

For example, CIGNA Dental members have access to several online tools and services including:

- A **Dental Treatment Cost Estimator** on myCIGNA.com, which exactly as it sounds, gives members the opportunity to select a treatment or procedure they are considering and estimate what their out-of-pocket cost would be prior to seeking care.
- Members can also access **WebMD dental content on myCIGNA.com**. This online source has more than 200 dental health articles and interactive tools. Members can learn about oral health topics, such as daily dental care and common dental problems, as well as treatments and suggestions for common conditions.
- Anyone who has online access can take CIGNA's **Cavity Risk Assessment Quiz** ([http://www.cigna.com/our\\_plans/programs/dental\\_health/quiz/cra\\_quiz.html](http://www.cigna.com/our_plans/programs/dental_health/quiz/cra_quiz.html)), which helps identify risk factors that may make individuals more susceptible to having cavities. The results can be printed out and taken to the dentist at the next visit, so that individuals can ask any questions or talk about what steps should be taken to improve their dental health.

“Every employer’s dental plan varies on what it provides their members, so it’s important to review your plan materials and ask questions to explore what your plan may offer,” said Dr. Hall.

**Keeping Good Eye Health in Sight** – Glaucoma, the leading cause of blindness, is sometimes called the “sneak thief of sight” because nearly half of those impacted didn’t notice any signs of the disease until they lost significant vision. According to Prevent Blindness America, nearly two million Americans age 40 and older are affected.

“Regular eye examinations are very important for the early detection of glaucoma as well as other eye diseases such as macular degeneration and cataracts,” said Dr. Denis Humphreys, director of optometric quality for CIGNA Vision.

“Glaucoma, if detected early can be treated with medications and laser surgery to help prevent vision loss.”

Anyone can get glaucoma, but there are risk factors that may increase your chances of developing the disease, including:<sup>2</sup>

- Age – people 60 and older are at greater risk. African-Americans show signs of glaucoma starting at age 35; other groups show signs after age 40. Caucasians age 50 and older are also at an increased risk of developing glaucoma.<sup>3</sup>
- Race – African-Americans are four to five times more likely to have glaucoma.
- Family history – If you have a parent or sibling with glaucoma, you could be at risk too.
- Medical history – Diabetes, previous eye injuries, eye surgery or long-term steroid use can also be contributing factors.

“Proper nutrition is also very important in maintaining good health of the eyes. A proper diet can help decrease the occurrence of and effects from macular degeneration,” said Dr. Humphreys.

According to the National Center on Physical Activity and Disability (NCPAD), the following are good sources of healthy vitamins for the eyes:

- Vitamin C – citrus fruits, Brussels sprouts, mango, strawberries
- Vitamin E – almonds, sunflower seeds, peanut butter
- Vitamin A (Beta Carotene) – carrots, squash, spinach
- Lutein and Zeaxanthin – corn, zucchini, broccoli

January has been designated as National Glaucoma Awareness Month. To learn more about this disease, visit [www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org).

**Healthy Smiles for Healthy Hearts** – Exercising more, eating healthier, reducing stress and quitting smoking are a few of the most commonly known ways to decrease your chances of having a heart attack or a stroke. But did you know that practicing good oral health can play a role in reducing your risk of having a heart attack or a stroke?

According to the American Heart Association, heart disease and stroke together claim more lives than any other disease, putting people of all ages – from infants to the elderly – at risk.

“While the exact link between gum disease and cardiovascular disease has not been firmly established, the association between the two is cause for concern,” said Dr. Robert Genco, a member of CIGNA Dental’s Clinical Advisory Panel. “When someone has gum disease, which is caused by a build up of plaque and tartar that causes bacterial infections, the bacteria and its byproducts from the gum tissue may enter the blood stream and cause small blood clots that may contribute to clogging of the arteries.”

In addition, Dr. Genco explains, gum disease causes gums to swell and that inflammation may also contribute to fatty deposits inside heart arteries.

According to Dr. Genco, brushing your teeth twice a day and flossing are important, as is having regular cleanings and check-ups by your dentist twice a year or as your dentist recommends. Even if you do an excellent job of brushing and flossing, tartar, which is plaque that gets hard and mineralizes on your teeth, can still remain on your teeth. Only a dental professional can remove tartar.

“There is no guarantee you will never have a heart attack or stroke by preventing gum disease, but taking good care of your mouth may reduce your risk,” said Dr. Genco.

To urge Americans to join the battle against heart disease, since 1963 Congress has required the president to proclaim February "American Heart Month." The American Heart Association works with the administration to draft and sign this annual proclamation.<sup>4</sup>

To learn more about oral and heart health, visit [www.perioheart.com](http://www.perioheart.com), or the CIGNA website at [http://www.cigna.com/our\\_plans/programs/dental\\_health/gum\\_disease\\_and\\_heart\\_disease.html](http://www.cigna.com/our_plans/programs/dental_health/gum_disease_and_heart_disease.html)

*If you would like to schedule an interview with any of CIGNA’s dental experts, please contact Jill Roman, public relations director for CIGNA Dental, at 215.761.1489 or [jill.roman@cigna.com](mailto:jill.roman@cigna.com).*

<sup>1</sup> Dye, B.A. Journal of the American Dental Association, January 2004; vol. 135. pp. 55-66.

<sup>2</sup> Prevent Blindness America

<sup>3</sup> Prevent Blindness America Eye Q Test, 2005

<sup>4</sup> [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

**About the CIGNA Dental Clinical Advisory Panel** – To facilitate the creation of innovative approaches to emerging issues related to developing technologies, medical/dental integration and evidence-based strategies, CIGNA Dental has organized an independent panel of well-known, clinical experts in dentistry. The CIGNA Dental Clinical Advisory Panel consists of leaders in the dental profession, many of whom are published and have served in leadership roles within their specialty or the American Dental Association. Several panel members have current academic appointments in major schools of dentistry, including the University of PA, Tufts, SUNY, and UCLA.

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