

*Just the Facts...*

**Oral Fitness During Deployment  
Wisdom Teeth**

<b>DAILY</b>	
<b>Clean Your Mouth</b>	<b>Watch What You Put In Your Mouth</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Floss daily</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Avoid or cut back on tobacco</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Brush after meals or before sleeping                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Use fluoride toothpaste and a gentle, circular motion for 2 minutes</li> <li>■ No toothpaste? Use table salt, baking soda or water</li> <li>■ <b>Don't</b> rinse, eat or drink for 30 minutes afterwards</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Limit sugar- or corn syrup-sweetened drinks, such as sodas, sports and energy drinks</li> <li>● Eat healthy foods from the 5 major food groups</li> <li>● Limit sugary, sticky, or starchy between-meal snacks</li> <li>● Eat tooth-friendly snack foods such as:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Nuts, fruit, raw vegetables, plain yogurt, or cheddar cheese (hardens tooth surface) do not promote decay-causing bacteria</li> <li>■ Black tea contains fluoride</li> <li>■ Xylitol gum or mints</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No toothbrush?                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Swish with water after eating</li> <li>■ Wipe teeth with a clean cloth</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Use gum or mints that contain xylitol as the first ingredient, 3 to 5 times a day, between meals or after snacks. Xylitol is a natural sweetener that blocks bacteria from turning starchy/sugary foods into acids which cause dental caries. Xylitol gum is found in the accessory pack of the MRE, and should be chewed for about 5 minutes after eating.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Chew xylitol gum after meals or snacks</li> </ul>	

<b>MONTHLY</b>	<b>YEARLY</b>
<b>Check for Changes in Your Mouth</b>	Have a dental exam/cleaning to detect and treat problems as soon as possible and to avoid becoming a Dental Casualty.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Perform an oral cancer self-exam every month if you have risk factors:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Tobacco use (smoked or smokeless)</li> <li>■ Alcohol or marijuana use</li> <li>■ Sun exposure</li> <li>■ Poor nutrition (lack of fruits and fresh vegetables)</li> <li>■ Viral STDs (HPV, Herpes, CMV)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If anything looks different-white, red, bleeding, or lumpy -see your dentist immediately</li> </ul>	

**Watch what you put in your mouth.**

*Everything* that goes into the mouth affects oral health, either positively or negatively. Soldiers should use Combat Stress Control techniques to deal with the stress of deployment, rather than harmful oral habits. Soldiers should limit sugar-sweetened or fructose, glucose or sucrose and high fructose corn syrup-sweetened drinks, such as sports drinks, energy drinks, sodas, and punch. If you do drink these drinks, use a straw that reaches to the back of your tongue. Nutrients such as vitamins A, C, D, E, B2, Niacin, B6, B12, Folic Acid, and minerals such as Zinc, Iron, and Calcium are essential for repairing the lining of your mouth, maintaining your gums, and preventing bone loss around your teeth. Choose healthy snack foods that protect or improve your oral health. When deciding what snack to eat, think about:

- The type of snack (e.g., raw vegetables would be a better snack than potato chips)
- How often you eat sugary and starchy snacks (the more often you snack, the more likely you are to get tooth decay)
- How long the snack stays in your mouth
- The texture of the snack. Starchy or sticky foods stay on the teeth longer.

Soldiers should also avoid or cut back on tobacco use. If you get stuck somewhere down range without tobacco, you will have nicotine withdrawal. Your cravings will cause irritability, anger, and frustration impaired concentration and restlessness and anxiety and depression. Smokeless tobacco wears away your gums and increases your risk of tooth decay and gum disease. It causes white leathery patches that can turn into oral cancer. Smoking can cause gum disease, bone loss, tooth loss, and oral cancer. Other risk factors for oral cancer include alcohol use, sun exposure, viral STDs, and poor nutrition. All Soldiers should have an oral cancer examination by a health care professional during their annual examination, but Soldiers who have risk factors for oral cancer should perform an oral cancer self-examination every month. If anything looks different -- white, red, bleeding, lumpy, or just different - see your dentist immediately.

## Why is oral fitness important?

Today's Soldiers need to stay physically fit and healthy in order to support unit preparations and deploy rapidly to any region of the globe. Combat-ready Soldiers need healthy mouths for:

1. Communication (speaking, smiling, or whistling). The teeth work with the lips and tongue to make the sounds that we use for talking.
2. Energy intake (tasting, chewing, and swallowing). A healthy, high-fiber diet requires chewing. Your body can get more vitamins and nutrients from food after it has been chewed. All of your teeth are equally important. You use your front teeth to cut food, and your back teeth to grind the food.



*A soldier whose dental infection has spread to the face requires hospitalization, surgery, and IV antibiotics.*

Oral diseases interfere with these functions, and can cause severe, life-threatening illness. When a soldier is identified as a Dental Class 3, it means that they have a condition that will probably cause a serious problem within the next 12 months. During deployment, Soldiers with dental problems usually require medical evacuation for treatment. Medical evacuation in theater can be delayed for long periods due to sand storms or transportation problems. Every time a Soldier has to be transported out of the area of operations for dental treatment, they expose themselves and their fellow Soldiers to attacks from insurgents. Soldiers who do not take care of their mouths could put their buddies in the line of fire.



*A soldier with a dental infection that drained through the cheek, leaving a permanent scar.*

## What are the symptoms of oral diseases?

Oral diseases are like ticking time bombs. You usually cannot tell that you have a problem until it causes:

- Temperature sensitivity
- Impaired duty performance
- Excruciating pain
- Difficulty eating
- Trouble pronouncing words
- Death
- Inability to sleep
- Swelling of the face or neck

It is important for all Soldiers to receive a dental exam and cleaning every year to detect and treat problems as soon as possible and to avoid becoming a Dental Casualty.

## What causes oral diseases?

Many diseases can affect your mouth. These oral diseases usually result from poor oral hygiene practices, inadequate fluoride intake, poor nutrition, and/or tobacco use. Unfortunately, many Soldiers use harmful oral habits, such as tobacco use and excessive consumption of sugary drinks or snacks, to stay alert or deal with the stress of deployment. There are three major causes of dental casualties during training and deployments:

- Painful or infected wisdom teeth
- Periodontal disease (gum disease)
- Dental caries (tooth decay)

## Wisdom Teeth

Wisdom teeth come in between the ages of 18 and 25. If there is not enough room in the jaw for a wisdom tooth, it can become trapped part way beneath the gums or tipped sideways. Tipped or partially covered wisdom teeth should be removed because they are hard to clean. They usually become decayed, or the gums around the tooth become swollen and infected. Submerged wisdom teeth should also be removed if the sac around the developing tooth expands and starts to destroy the nearby bones and teeth.

## How can I prevent oral diseases?

Perform oral hygiene daily to remove food debris, plaque buildup and bacteria. Toothbrush, toothpaste, and dental floss are available in the Health and Comfort Pack (HCP), Type I (NSN 8970-01-368-9154). Avoid a dental emergency during deployment by attaining Dental Class 1 (no dental treatment needed) before you leave. Active Duty Soldiers can receive needed dental care through their assigned Dental Treatment Facility, or DTF, when they are in Garrison. Active Duty who are not assigned to an Army installation can request dental care as directed by AR 40-400. Keep in mind that the worse a Soldier's oral disease gets, the longer it takes to fix the problem. Soldiers who do not take care of their mouths develop severe dental problems that require numerous visits to the dental clinic for dental reconstruction upon redeployment. **PMCS your mouth during deployment.**



U.S. Army Public Health Command (Provisional)  
 Directorate of Health Promotion and Wellness  
 410-436-4656 or DSN 584-4656  
 Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010-5403