

SMILE!

From the whiteness of your teeth to the freshness of your breath, improved oral health will help you feel more confident.

YOUR TEETH

The biggest reason people feel self-conscious about their smile is discoloured teeth, according to research from the British Dental Health Foundation*. 'Teeth often appear stained due to a build-up of plaque,' explains holistic dentist Suzanne Roelofs. 'Brushing after eating, and cleaning between your teeth, will help to prevent discolouration.' Sour and sugary foods produce acids in your mouth that can damage teeth, so it's important to clean them off quickly. However, wait about 30 minutes before brushing, as acidic foods temporarily soften enamel and may make it easier to damage.

'Lessening the amount of teeth-staining substances you consume, such as coffee, tea and red wine, and quitting smoking will help to prevent discolouration,' says Suzanne. 'If your tooth enamel is already

marked, brushing with a toothpaste containing baking soda can reduce stains. You can make your own by mixing 5 tbsp organic raw

coconut oil with 2 tsp each of finely ground Celtic sea salt and baking soda. Stir in a few drops of peppermint essential oil and store in an airtight container. 'Baking soda neutralises your mouth's pH and is abrasive, so scrubs off stains. Celtic sea salt, which is less refined than 'normal' sea salt, can help remineralise teeth, while coconut oil has antibacterial properties. Just be sure to use a soft toothbrush to avoid eroding your teeth with the abrasive baking soda,' says Suzanne.

For more profound whitening, visit your dentist for a professional treatment. A natural toothpaste that doesn't contain chemicals or harsh abrasives can also lighten teeth. Try Jason Powersmile Whitening Toothpaste (£4.99, jasonnaturalcare.co.uk).



YOUR BREATH

Bad breath, also called halitosis, is usually caused by poor oral hygiene, as bacteria breaks down pieces of food trapped between teeth, releasing foul-smelling gases. To alleviate this, Suzanne recommends brushing 30 minutes after every meal using interdental brushes, which get between teeth, as well as using your usual brush.

Dehydration is another common cause. The decrease in fluid in the mouth means food isn't washed away as much, leading to it rotting. Drink water throughout the day to avoid this. The European Food Safety

- Authority recommends eight 200ml glasses a day.

'Gum disease and an overgrowth of candida (thrush) on your tongue can cause smelly breath too,' advises Suzanne. 'Both need to be diagnosed by a dentist. Candida can be treated with an anti-fungal medicine.' Bad breath can also be caused by dysbiosis, which is when too many bad bacteria in your gut cause poor digestion. Diet can help. 'Parsley counteracts halitosis and improves digestion,' says Suzanne, 'while lemon destroys putrefactive (decay-causing) bacteria in the mouth.'

People who suffer from bad breath may avoid getting close to others, which can prevent them from forming close relationships.

YOUR GUMS

If your gums are red, swollen, sore or bleeding, you may have gum disease. 'In early stages, it's called gingivitis, which is usually caused by plaque,' says Suzanne. Gingivitis can be prevented by flossing, avoiding sugary foods and drinks, and eating a nutrient-rich diet that feeds the tissues in the mouth.

'Vitamin C helps the immune system function well so that it can fight the bad bacteria that cause gum disease. It is also

essential for collagen formation, a vital component of the gums. In extreme cases, a lack of vitamin C can lead to scurvy, causing gums to swell and bleed. Include oranges, red and green peppers, berries and broccoli in your diet. Meanwhile, bioflavonoids, antioxidants found in spinach and green tea, help the body absorb vitamin C.

'If left unchecked, gingivitis can escalate into periodontitis, which can cause teeth to fall out. Gum disease needs to be assessed by a dentist, who may recommend Bone One Session Treatment, which removes infection-causing bacteria from pockets between your teeth.'



YOUR LIPS

'As we age, our lips lose plumpness and become drier as skin struggles to produce enough moisture-boosting hyaluronic acid,' explains beauty expert Jill Zander.

'A slick of moisturising balm will plump out the top layer of cells on your lips. Dab some highlighting concealer on your cupid's bow before applying a lipstick that's a touch stronger than your natural lip colour. Finish with gloss to create a fuller pout.'

A lack of vitamin B2, B3 or B12 or low iron levels can cause the corners of the mouth to crack, as can candida. Alcohol consumption also dries lips due to dehydration. You can get vitamin B2 from eggs, broccoli avocado, dairy, sprouts and wholegrain cereals. Foods such as meat, poultry and fish will keep your B3 topped up, while milk, cheese, poultry, eggs, fish and shellfish will boost your B12. Foods containing iron include almonds, apricots, avocado, liver, sunflower and pumpkin seeds and poultry. Alternatively, take a B vitamin complex. Try Nature's Plus Super B-50 (£11.25, revital.co.uk).



FURTHER INFORMATION

- Dentist Suzanne Roelofs (whiteandholland.com).
- Jill Zander Skin Rejuvenation Clinic (jillzander.co.uk).
- Oral health campaign, National Smile Month, runs 18 May-18 June 2015 (nationalsmilemonth.org).

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