Healthy You

FAST FACTS FOR YOUR HEALTH

4 Nutrient Powerhouses for Healthy Gums

Eating to prevent gum disease? It's something you may not have considered before, but here's why you should: Gum disease can cause a lot of problems, ranging from pain and bleeding to tooth loss. And nearly half of Americans age 30 or older have some form of gum disease.1

The most severe form of gum disease, which is called periodontitis, is also linked to other chronic health conditions throughout the body, such as diabetes and heart disease.

Many things can prevent or control gum disease: quitting smoking, limiting alcohol, seeing your dentist twice yearly and routine at-home care (brushing and flossing). But among the most enjoyable ways is to fill your plate with nutritious foods that may help keep inflammation and bleeding at bay and promote healthy gums.

Here, we share four nutrients that can have gum-protecting power.

Gum-Health Nutrient #1: Omega-3s

Why it's helpful: Research has showed that omega-3 fatty acids may help control inflammation in your gums. Inflammation in your gums, which your doctor may refer to as gingivitis, is a mild form of gum disease. But it's still important to control it before it progresses to severe gum disease.

Foods high in omega-3s: Fatty fish (salmon, sardines, anchovies, herring and mackerel are good choices), walnuts, soybeans, flax seeds and chia seeds

Gum-Health Nutrient #2: Vitamin C

Why it's helpful: Vitamin C is one of the best nutrients to help prevent gum disease, as it reduces inflammation in your mouth and helps strengthen your teeth (which can help prevent them from falling out).

Foods high in vitamin C: Citrus fruits (like oranges, lemons and pink grapefruit), strawberries, potatoes, broccoli, kiwi and leafy greens (like kale and spinach)

Gum-Health Nutrient #3: Vitamin B12

Why it's helpful: Evidence has shown that people low in vitamin B12 are more prone to bleeding gums, and research has also associated vitamin B12 deficiencies to the most severe forms of gum disease.

Foods high in vitamin B12: Eggs, low-fat dairy (milk, cheese and yogurt are good sources), beef, chicken, fish (such as salmon, trout, tuna and sardines) and B12-fortified cereals

Gum-Health Nutrient #4: Vitamin A

Why it's helpful: Vitamin A keeps your gums strong by keeping your mouth's saliva stores and mucous membranes healthy.

Foods high in vitamin A: Leafy greens, beef liver and eggs are top sources. Orange-colored produce (oranges, pumpkin, carrots and sweet potatoes) are also good picks — although they don't contain vitamin A, they are high in beta carotene, which your body converts to vitamin A.

Eating for Gum Disease Is Great, Seeing Your Dentist Is Even Better

Eating a nutritious diet is great for your gum health, mouth health and overall health. But when it comes to taking the best care of your gums, it's most important to keep twice-yearly dental visits. During these visits, your dentist will be able to tell if your gums are showing the earliest signs of disease — even before you notice anything is wrong. Your dentist will help prevent it from getting worse and keep your smile bright for years to come.

If you need help finding an in-network dentist, Delta Dental of Iowa can help. Give us a call at the number on the back of your Delta Dental ID card or search for dentists online.

SOURCES:
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Recipe: Succhini Squash Casserole

You can find delicious seasonal produce any time of year, but it's hard to compare to the bounty summer brings to the table. If you're looking to take advantage of the freshest picks this time of year, keep an eye out for zucchini and yellow squash the next time you're at the grocery store or browsing your local farmer's market.

If you've long enjoyed these two summer squash stars, you know how delicious they can be. But if these veggies are new to you, a great way to ease into them is by baking them in a casserole. Adding a blend of cheeses makes everything taste better — and it serves up some additional health benefits for your mouth.

You probably know that cheese is high in calcium, which is a nutrient that helps build strong bones (including your teeth). It also helps prevent cavities by neutralizing acid from plaque. Zucchini also has a special benefit for your mouth: It contains vitamin A, which may help protect against oral cancer.

This casserole makes a satisfying vegetarian main dish or veggie-forward side.

Ingredients
4 medium-sized zucchini, chopped
2 medium-sized yellow squash, chopped
½ yellow onion, chopped
⅔ cup shredded mozzarella cheese, divided
½ cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese, divided
1 teaspoon dried basil
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
1 teaspoon garlic powder
½ teaspoon dried thyme
½ teaspoon dried oregano
½ cup grated Parmesan cheese

Directions
1. Preheat the oven to 350 F.

2. Lightly grease a casserole dish (a 9x13" dish works well) with butter or cooking spray.

3. Gently mix zucchini, squash, onion, ½ cup mozzarella cheese, ¼ cup cheddar cheese and basil in a large bowl. Season mixture with salt and pepper. Stir in garlic powder, thyme and oregano.

4. Transfer mixture to prepared dish and bake for 25 to 30 minutes.

5. Carefully take the casserole dish out of the oven and top with remaining mozzarella and cheddar cheeses. Sprinkle Parmesan cheese on top.

6. Return the casserole to the oven and bake for an additional 10 to 15 minutes until the cheese is bubbling. If the cheese topping isn't cooked to your liking, broil for 1-2 more minutes to produce a golden, crunchy top.

7. Remove the casserole from the oven and let it cool at least 5 minutes before serving.