



## Preventive Dental and Vision Care During COVID-19: Weighing Risks and Benefits

With the COVID-19 pandemic still front and center in the daily lives of all Iowans, it's understandable to ask, "Is it safe to go to my preventive dental or vision appointment?"

When you don't have an apparent or urgent health concern, it may seem unnecessary — even unsafe — to go a dentist's office or eye care facility, but knowing the facts and doing a bit of self-reflection will help you make the right decision for you.

### How Dentists and Doctors Are Making Their Offices Safe

Since the pandemic changed the lives of all Iowans in March 2020, many new safety precautions and procedures have now become common in healthcare offices, including dentist and eye care offices.

Fortunately, more healthcare offices have access to the necessary personal protective equipment (like face shields) than they did early on in the pandemic. And, using guidance from organizations like the American Dental Association (ADA), dentists and other healthcare providers are putting extra safety measures in place to keep patients and staff safe. These measures include:

- More frequent disinfecting of surfaces and tools, including additional cleaning between each patient visit
- Wearing more protective equipment
- Doing daily COVID-19 screenings on staff
- Doing COVID-19 screenings on patients prior to their visit

Despite the guidance from national organizations, it's important to understand that all dental and vision offices have responded to the pandemic differently. If you are concerned about whether it is safe to go to your preventive appointment, call your dentist or eye provider and ask them what they are doing to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Some questions you may ask include:

- What new procedures have you put in place to keep staff and patients safe
- What cleaning measures are you taking? Will my exam room be cleaned immediately before and after my visit?
- Is the office reducing the number of patients served to ensure social distancing

## Should I Go? Two Important Questions to Ask Yourself

Getting a clear picture of how your dentist or vision provider has responded to the pandemic is important. But as you weigh whether to keep your scheduled preventive dentists or vision appointment, asking yourself these two questions are crucial:

1. Am I feeling sick?
2. Is someone in my household feeling sick?

Please stay home if you or someone in your household is not feeling well. Staying home if you or someone you live with is sick is the best way to stop the spread of COVID-19.

## If You Don't Go Now, Make a Plan

If you are not comfortable going to your preventive dental or vision appointment, or if you or someone in your household is sick, plan on rescheduling your appointment as opposed to canceling.

Rescheduling your appointment will ensure your care doesn't slip. Canceling your appointment means that you'll have to call back to reschedule — and remembering to do that can be hard as life gets busy. Rescheduling your preventive appointment will take one item off your to-do list, while allowing you to get the all-important preventive care you need to stay healthy.

### SOURCES:

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/preventing-the-spread-of-the-coronavirus#:~:text=Many%20medical%20and%20dental%20practices,will%20let%20you%20know.>

<https://www.webmd.com/lung/coronavirus-dental-care#1>

## Calcium Is Great, But You Need Vitamin D, Too

Your teeth are bones, and what nutrient helps feed your bones above any other? Calcium! Most of us know that our bones need calcium to grow and rebuild, but did you know that calcium works best with vitamin D?

Vitamin D supports the calcium absorption process — that is, it helps your bones soak up calcium to be strong and healthy. If you don't have enough vitamin D in your system, which your doctor may refer to as a vitamin D deficiency, your body could be absorbing only a fraction of the calcium you're consuming — as little as 1/3 of it.

How do you get vitamin D? One simple way is to get it by spending a 10-30 minutes in the midday sun a few times a week. If you are in the sun longer than 30 minutes, use sunscreen to prevent sunburn.

Sun breaks are a great solution for the summer, but what do you do in the dead of a cold Iowa winter? Eating vitamin D-rich foods and using a supplement will ensure your body has enough of this important nutrient — even if sitting the sun isn't an option.

## How to Get Vitamin D in Your Diet

Some vitamins and nutrients are found naturally in lots of foods and beverages — vitamin D is not one of those nutrients. Vitamin D is found in a short list of grocery items. The biggest vitamin D dietary powerhouses include:

- Vitamin D-fortified milk
- Vitamin D-fortified orange juice
- Mushrooms
- Egg yolks
- Fatty fish (such as tuna, sardines, salmon and mackerel)

If you don't like to eat those foods, you can incorporate a vitamin D supplement into your daily routine. But before you do that, talk to your doctor about the amount you should take. Taking too high a vitamin D supplement dose can be unsafe, so it's important your doctor knows what you're taking and how much.

## How Much Vitamin D Should You Get Each Day?

According to Harvard health experts, people taking a vitamin D supplement likely do not need more than 600-800 IU per day of vitamin D. If you have a bone condition (such as osteoporosis) or a disorder that prevents you from absorbing calcium or vitamin D properly,

## Bone Health Is Oral Health, Too

It's easy to forget that eating for bone health also helps your oral health — your teeth are bones, after all! During the winter months, it's especially important to feed your bones with vitamin D-rich foods.

If you start a new supplement, give your doctor a call to ensure it's the right move for you, and don't forget to tell your dentist at your next visit, too. Keeping your healthcare providers informed of everything you're taking — not just medications but supplements as well — is one of the best ways you can advocate for your own health.

## SOURCES:

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/taking-too-much-vitamin-d-can-cloud-its-benefits-and-create-health-risks#:~:text=If%20you're%20taking%20a,D%20or%20calcium%2C%20says%20Dr.>

<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/vitamin-d-from-sun#:~:text=Regular%20sun%20exposure%20is%20the,a%20little%20more%20than%20this.>