

Healthy You

FAST FACTS FOR YOUR HEALTH

Q&A With Dr. Chad: Astigmatism Basics

When your eye doctor says “you have astigmatism,” you may wonder what that really means. What are the treatments? What does this say about the health of your eyes?

We reached out to Dr. Chad Overman, Delta Dental of Iowa’s director of vision benefits, to get some answers about astigmatism. Spoiler alert: You have nothing to worry about!

Q: What is astigmatism? Should I be worried if my eye doctor says I have astigmatism?

Dr. Overman: Astigmatism is simply when the focus of the light coming through your eye comes to more than one focal point. This occurs because the cornea of your eye has an irregular shape. Astigmatism is not something to worry about. Although there are ways to treat it, astigmatism is not a health issue but rather a refractive issue like nearsightedness or farsightedness. Having astigmatism doesn’t have any effect on your ability to have great eye health now and in the future.

Q: How is astigmatism treated?

Dr. Overman: If you have mild astigmatism, your doctor may not need any treatment at all. But if you have moderate or severe astigmatism, your doctor may prescribe specially designed eyeglasses and contacts to give you the clearest vision. Some astigmatism can be corrected with laser eye surgery.

Q: Is there anything else about astigmatism that patients should understand?

Dr. Overman: It’s important that people understand that if your doctor tells you that you have astigmatism, that it’s not a cause for concern and it’s easily corrected. One thing that happens when people first get new glasses or contacts for astigmatism is that everything may look slanted or shifted for a few minutes after the initial wear or up to a few days. This is normal and will go away. But be careful on steps and curbs for a few days to ensure you don’t trip and injure yourself. If your eyes aren’t seeing clearly after a few days, give your eye doctor a call.

How to Keep Your Tongue Clean (and Why You Should)

Brush your teeth, floss, rinse with mouthwash...brush your tongue? Another oral health habit to keep up with?

Here's the deal: The tongue harbors a lot of bacteria in your mouth. A quick brush is an easy way to keep that bacteria under control. It's a simple add-on to your routine that delivers some big benefits.

Before we get into how to clean your tongue, we'll explain why it's so important to do it in the first place.

Benefits of Cleaning Your Tongue Each Day

When it comes to the most common dental health problems, including cavities, gum disease and bad breath, a buildup of bacteria is often to blame. And bacteria like to live on your tongue. This is because your tongue is bumpy, rough and damp — an ideal environment for bacteria to grow. When bacteria is building up on your tongue, you might see a white coating over your tongue's surface.

Regularly cleaning your tongue will reduce the amount of bacteria on its surface. Less bacteria means that you'll have less bad breath, reduced plaque and an all-around fresher feeling mouth.

Benefits of a Once-Monthly Tongue Self-Check

While we're on the subject of paying more attention to your tongue, it's a good idea to check your tongue each month for any new bumps, sores, bleeding, discoloration or anything that looks out of the ordinary. Your dentist does this at each of your twice-yearly preventive visits, but it's a good idea for you to take a look as well. Most tongue issues are easily treatable and not critical, but they could be linked to oral cancer. Detecting any issues early could save your life.

If you notice anything different about your tongue during a check, or if you're feeling pain or changes in how your tongue moves, give your dentist a call. He or she will help get to the bottom of the issue and provide peace of mind.

How to Clean Your Tongue

Cleaning your tongue can fit easily into your current dental health routine. Put a small amount of toothpaste on your tongue and gently brush over the whole surface. Rinse with mouthwash or some water.

You can also buy special tools to clean your tongue, called tongue scrapers. These can help effectively clean your tongue, but they aren't necessary. Cleaning with your toothbrush and toothpaste will work fine to limit bacteria and keep your mouth fresh and healthy.