

BRUSH UP ON
NATURAL ORAL
CARE FOR FRESH,
HEALTHY TEETH
AND GUMS

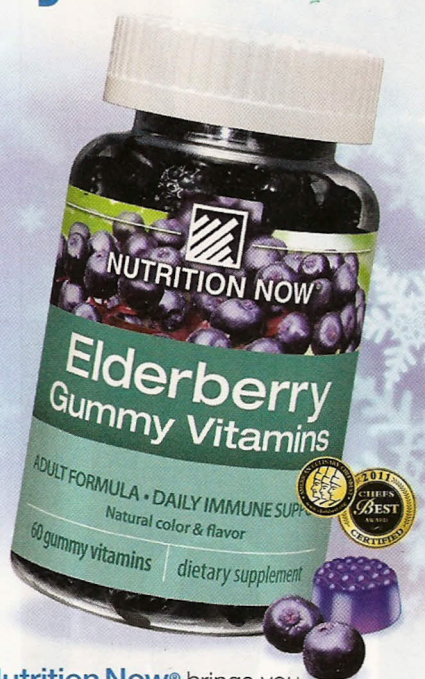
Smile!

Another flossing lecture from the dentist? She's not just flapping her gums. Cavity- and gum-disease-causing bacteria are linked to inflammation that can have serious health consequences like heart disease and pregnancy complications, say experts. "Good oral hygiene habits are important to eliminate or reduce the bacterial infections that can start in the mouth," says Jeanette M. Kern, DDS, a holistic dentist in Monterey, California.

Luckily, you can banish bad oral bugs with natural products, free from potentially harmful parabens, phthalates, artificial flavors, and chemical sweeteners. "These ingredients get very easily absorbed in the mouth," says Esther Rubin, DDS, a New York City-based holistic dentist. Opt for products that contain herbal, mineral, and other nutritional ingredients to keep your teeth and gums in top form. ➤

NUTRITION NOW®

Be good to your immune system



Nutrition Now® brings you the daily immune support you may need every day in a delicious gummy vitamin. Our elderberry gummies, made with natural color and flavor, also contain zinc and vitamins A, C, and E. Support your immune system with the good stuff from nature.*



Available at fine health food stores nationwide.

nutritionnow.com

The ChefsBest® Certified Award is awarded to brands highly rated overall by independent professional chefs. 

*This statement has not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. These products are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.

Cavities and tooth decay

Unhealthy bacteria convert sugars from foods into lactic acid, creating a sticky layer of plaque, which destroys tooth enamel and leads to cavities. Look for toothpaste, mouthwash, gum, and mints with xylitol, a low-calorie natural sweetener that starves bacteria and enhances mineral absorption to prevent plaque and strengthen teeth. Other ingredients to look for: cranberry extract and green tea, which keep bacteria from sticking to teeth; calcium, which helps remineralize and strengthen teeth; licorice root and neem to keep plaque- and cavity-causing bacteria at bay; and peelu, a fiber from the peelu tree, used for centuries in Asia and the Middle East to clean teeth.

And don't forget diet. Limit sticky, sugary foods and candies and processed-flour foods because their carbohydrates adhere to teeth for longer, feeding the sugar-hungry bacteria, Kern says. Nosh on crunchy foods like apples and carrots to help sweep away debris that feed bacteria. Their high water content, and the saliva they stimulate, dilute bacteria-promoting sugars. **Our picks:** Spry Xylitol Gum; Vitacare Multicare Toothpaste

Gum health

Bacteria under gums can cause inflamed tissue that bleeds easily. Floss and picks help dislodge the bad bacteria, kill them, or crowd them out. Research shows that probiotics like *Streptococcus salivarius*, *S. uberis* and *S. oralis* and several lactobacillus strains attach to the teeth and gums and starve harmful oral bacteria by competing with them for food. Products with coenzyme Q10 and B vitamins encourage red blood cell development, which Rubin says is critical for gum health. To soothe irritation, look for aloe vera, tea tree oil, and myrrh.

You may even soon see oral care products with omega-3 fatty acids, which fight inflammation and keep bacteria at bay. Right now, get omega-3s through diet or supplements. Also eat lots of deeply colored vegetables and other foods high in vitamins A, C, and E, selenium, lycopene, and lutein, such as dark leafy greens, citrus fruits, tomatoes, and eggs. A diet low in these antioxidants is linked to increased gum-disease risk.

Our picks: Nature's Answer PerioWash; Oragenics EvoraPlus

Discolored teeth

Your teeth naturally darken as you age, Kern says. Drinking smile-stainers like coffee, tea, and red wine makes matters worse. To reclaim those pearly whites, you can turn to whitening pens, toothpastes, mouthwashes, or strips containing hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂). Kern says that H₂O₂, which breaks down into water and oxygen in your mouth, is safe for home use in concentrations of 3 percent or lower (dentists may use higher amounts). A bonus: One of its byproducts, urea, kills plaque. "The gum tissues look healthier when people are whitening their teeth," she says. Other safe whitening options include mild abrasives like silica, baking powder, and bamboo powder.

Our picks: Dr. Sharp Whitening Toothpaste; Jason PowerSmile Enzyme Brightening System; White2Nite Whitening Pen

Bad breath

Don't just blame the onions: Kern says bad breath can also result from post-nasal drip, acid reflux, or dry mouth. Each creates a low-saliva or high-acid environment, which causes bacteria to accumulate in sticky, odor-causing plaque layers. That said, some foods are notorious for creating bad breath. Onions and garlic produce the sulfur compounds responsible for a rotten-egg smell. Protein-rich foods such as milk, cheese, and fish create a breeding ground for bacteria, as do acidic drinks like coffee and orange juice. Conversely, anything that kills bacteria or prevents them from sticking to oral surfaces—such as green tea, cranberry, antioxidants, xylitol, and probiotics—will prevent bad breath.

Our picks: Nature's Gate Classics Toothpaste; Now Foods OralBiotic; Preserve Tongue Cleaner

Sensitive teeth

When gums recede (because of improper brushing), exposed roots are vulnerable to zingers from hot, cold, and sweet sensations. Ease the pain with products containing potassium nitrate, a salt that helps seal the microscopic tubes that convey sensation to the inside of the tooth, or herbs like ratanhia, chamomile, myrrh, and clove oil, which have a long history of use for minimizing pain and inflammation and healing oral tissue wounds.

Our picks: Kiss My Face Sensitive Toothpaste; Weleda Plant Gel Toothpaste 