



HEALTH MATTERS

A PUBLICATION FOR TRICARE® BENEFICIARIES

The Dentist Is In ...

Protect Your Teeth With Fluoride



U.S. Air Force Col.
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How can you keep your teeth strong and healthy? Daily brushing and flossing help, of course, but there's another way to protect your teeth. You should make sure you're getting fluoride.

We've all heard of fluoride, but what is it, exactly? Fluoride is a mineral that occurs naturally in soil, water, and air. According to the National Institutes of Health, it helps prevent tooth decay by strengthening the tooth's hard outer surface, called enamel.

No matter your age, your teeth will benefit from fluoride. Here are several ways to help yourself get enough fluoride to protect your teeth.

- **Drink fluoridated tap water.** An easy way to get fluoride is by drinking fluoridated tap water. You can find out the amount of fluoride in your community's water by checking with your local water utility. If you have well water, it will need to be tested for fluoride concentration. Although some bottled waters have the recommended amount of fluoride, many don't.
- **Enjoy fluoride-rich foods.** Eating seafood can up your fluoride intake.
- **Use toothpaste and mouthwash with fluoride.** Many toothpastes and mouthwashes contain fluoride. You can buy a fluoride toothpaste and brush twice a day. However, you shouldn't use fluoride toothpaste for children younger than age 2 unless your child's dentist advises you to do so. Children younger than age 6 should avoid fluoride mouth rinses.
- **Get fluoride treatments from your dentist.** Your dentist can treat your teeth with a topical fluoride gel to provide more protection. The TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) covers two topical fluoride treatments in a consecutive 12-month period for ages 1 and up.

Even if you're getting enough fluoride, you should still schedule regular visits with your dentist. Your dentist or hygienist can clean your teeth and check for signs of tooth decay. The TDP covers two routine dental exams and cleanings in a consecutive 12-month period. If you have any questions about fluoride, talk to your dentist.

Thank you,
Col. Linda Coates



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ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

TDP Is Your Ally in the Fight Against Oral Cancer

Learn how TDP benefits can help you detect and fight oral cancer. See page 4.

Tips to Protect Your Teeth in a Dental Emergency

Learn tips to help keep your teeth safe in an emergency. See page 5.

Moving or Just Moved? Get Set Up With a New Dentist

TDP has online tools to help you find the right dentist. See page 6.

Wisdom Teeth and Extraction: When and Why Is It Necessary?

You may know someone who has had their wisdom teeth removed. But what exactly are wisdom teeth, and how can they cause problems? If you or a family member needs a wisdom tooth extraction, will the procedure be covered?

Read on to learn about wisdom teeth, including facts about extraction and TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) coverage.

What are wisdom teeth?

Wisdom teeth, or third molars, are the last permanent teeth to appear in the mouth. They usually appear in adults from age 17–25. Some adults never develop wisdom teeth. Others can develop up to four wisdom teeth.

Wisdom teeth can develop normally, like other molars. However, many people experience impacted wisdom teeth. This happens when the teeth don't have enough room to fully emerge through the gums or develop normally. Some impacted wisdom teeth never erupt into the mouth at all. In this case, you may not be able to see the tooth, or you may only see part of the tooth.

When is extraction necessary?

Not all wisdom teeth need to be removed. However, your dentist must monitor your wisdom teeth to ensure they're coming in properly, even if there's no pain. The TDP covers two routine dental exams in a consecutive 12-month period. If there are problems with your wisdom teeth, your dentist can recommend a treatment plan that's right for you.

You may need a tooth extracted if you feel pain. Other problems could also lead to extraction, such as:

- Food and debris trapped behind the tooth
- Infection or gum disease
- Tooth decay in a partially erupted tooth
- Damage to a nearby tooth or surrounding bone
- A cyst around the tooth
- Complications with orthodontic treatments to straighten other teeth

What do I need to know about the extraction procedure?

A wisdom tooth extraction is almost always an outpatient procedure. This means that you go home the same day. The hospital or dental clinic staff will instruct you on what to do on the day of the surgery. A dentist or an oral surgeon will perform the procedure. You may receive some type of numbing agent or anesthesia before the procedure. After the procedure, make sure to follow your dentist's instructions.

Does the TDP cover extraction?

Yes, the TDP covers wisdom teeth extraction. Find information about wisdom teeth removal and TDP benefit details at www.uccitdp.com. ★



Who's Covered Under the TDP Survivor Benefit

The TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) Survivor Benefit replaces the TDP when a sponsor dies. It provides the same benefit coverage as the regular TDP for surviving military family members.

Spouses are eligible for the survivor benefit for three years from the date of the sponsor's death. Children are eligible until age 21, or age 23 if they meet certain school enrollment and financial support conditions.

When you have the TDP Survivor Benefit, the government pays 100% of your monthly premiums. Survivor cost-shares are the

same as TDP cost-shares. You get 100% in-network coverage for most diagnostic and preventive services. There are varying cost-shares for routine and specialty care.

The TDP Survivor Benefit is automatic for survivors who have TDP at the time of their sponsor's death. You can also enroll in the TDP and get the survivor benefit even if you didn't have TDP coverage at that time. The Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System will automatically notify you of your eligibility.

For more information on the TDP Survivor Benefit, visit the "Benefits" section at www.uccitdp.com. ★



TDP Is Your Ally in the Fight Against Oral Cancer

Oral cancer isn't among the most common types of cancer, but it's a serious issue. According to the National Institutes of Health (www.nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/oral-cancer), health care providers diagnose about 54,000 new cases of oral cancer each year in the United States.

"As with all types of cancer, education and early detection are critical," said Doug Elsesser, program analyst with the Defense Health Agency's TRICARE Dental Program. "Learn how to spot the warning signs of oral cancer before the disease can spread."

Read on to learn about the causes and symptoms of oral cancer, as well as how your TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) benefits can help you in the fight against this disease.

Causes

Oral cancer includes cancers of the mouth and the back of the throat. It affects more than twice as many men as women.

Several lifestyle choices can increase your risk of developing oral cancer. These include:

- **Tobacco use.** Both smoking and smokeless tobacco increase your risk.
- **Heavy alcohol use.**
- **Human papillomavirus (HPV).** Infection with this sexually transmitted disease has been linked to oral cancer.
- **Sun exposure.** This can lead to cancer of the lip.

Symptoms

There are several symptoms of oral cancer, including:

- A sore, irritation, lump, or thick patch in your mouth, lip, or throat
- A white or red patch in your mouth
- A sore throat or a feeling that something is caught in your throat

- Difficulty chewing, swallowing, or speaking
- Difficulty moving your jaw or tongue
- Swelling of your jaw
- Numbness in your tongue or other areas of your mouth
- Ear pain

Talk to your dentist if you have any of these symptoms for more than two weeks.

Early detection is key

As with most types of cancer, the earlier you detect oral cancer, the better your chances of survival. You can do an oral cancer self-check by using the mirror and checking your mouth, face, and neck for lumps, swelling, tenderness, or abnormal skin texture.

Also, it's important to see your dentist on a regular basis. The TDP covers two routine dental exams in a consecutive 12-month period. Ask your dentist to look for any oral abnormalities if your routine exam doesn't include an oral cancer check.

Oral cancer and TDP Wellness Program

If you or a family member has already been diagnosed with oral cancer, you qualify for additional dental services through the TDP Wellness Program. This free program provides enhanced dental benefits to help you treat periodontal disease.

Covered gum disease services your dentist may recommend include an additional periodontal maintenance service per year and scaling and root planning, which is a deep cleaning of your teeth to remove tartar and plaque underneath your gums and on the root of your tooth. Your wellness benefit covers up to four of these periodontal procedures.

To register for the TDP Wellness Program, go to www.uccitdp.com and add your medical condition to the "Manage My Wellness" section of the My Account feature. ★

Tips to Protect Your Teeth in a Dental Emergency

When it comes to medical emergencies, your dental health may not be the first thing that comes to mind. But dental emergencies do happen, and they can happen anywhere, at any time.

Fortunately, the TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) covers emergency dental care. As noted in the *TRICARE Dental Program Handbook*, you'll pay no cost-share for emergency dental services regardless of your pay grade or location. But there are still steps you may need to take to ensure your teeth and gums stay protected. Remember, the most important step in any dental emergency is to get to a dentist as soon as possible.

"In any emergency, it's important to act quickly," said Doug Elsesser, program analyst with the Defense Health Agency's TRICARE Dental Program. "With a bit of preparation and knowledge, you may be able to keep the damage to a minimum."

Preparing for a dental emergency

If an emergency does happen, it's important to find a dentist right away. Remember to always keep your dentist's contact information with you so you're ready if an emergency arises.

You can also prepare a dental emergency kit to help you deal with pain, bleeding, and other problems until you can see a dentist. This kit should contain items such as:

- Cotton balls and swabs
- Dental floss
- Dental mirror
- Latex gloves or vinyl gloves
- Salt
- Cold compress

Identifying a dental emergency

Wondering what may be considered a dental emergency? These symptoms may require emergency care:

- Bleeding in the mouth or gums that doesn't stop
- Painful swelling in or around your mouth

- Pain in a tooth, teeth, or jawbone
- Gum infection with pain or swelling
- After surgery treatment (dressing change, stitch removal)
- Broken or knocked out tooth
- Denture adjustment for people receiving radiation or other treatment for cancer
- Snipping or adjusting wire of braces that hurts your cheek or gums
- Biopsy of abnormal tissue

Remember, you'll need to contact a dentist first to identify a true emergency. If you don't have a regular dentist, you can use the Find a Dentist tool at www.uccitdp.com/find-a-dentist.

Responding to a dental emergency

Contacting your dentist is key, but there are other steps you can take if something serious happens to one of your teeth.

If you have a cracked or broken tooth, you should rinse your mouth with warm water to clean the area surrounding the affected tooth. Then, apply a cold compress to reduce swelling.

If your tooth is knocked out, take the following steps to protect it until you reach the dentist:

- Recover the tooth, if possible.
- Hold it by the top, not the root, and gently rinse the root of the tooth with water, milk, or a saline solution. Don't scrub it or remove attached tissue.
- In some cases, you can temporarily put it back in the empty socket. Otherwise, place the tooth in a container of milk or saline solution. Don't put it in water.

In the event of a dental emergency, remember to keep calm and use these tips to help you prepare, identify, and respond. ★

Moving or Just Moved? Get Set Up With a New Dentist

Summer can be a time of big changes for military families. This is the season of permanent change of station orders. If you moved this summer, don't worry about changing your TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) coverage. Your coverage remains in place.

Make sure to update your new address and contact information in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System to help ensure a smooth transition of your dental coverage. You can go to <https://idco.dmdc.osd.mil/idco> or <https://milconnect.dmdc.osd.mil> to make updates.

If you need help finding a new dentist near you, you can search for one using the Find a Dentist tool at www.uccitdp.com/find-a-dentist. You can see any licensed dentist with TDP, but there are benefits to choosing a TDP network dentist if you live in the TDP CONUS service area (the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands).



Similarly, if you live in the TDP OCONUS service area (all areas outside the CONUS service area, including ships or vessels outside the territorial waters of the CONUS service area), there are benefits to choosing a TRICARE OCONUS Preferred Dentist. You can

learn about each of these dentist types in the *TRICARE Dental Program Handbook* at www.tricare.mil/publications. If you have questions or need help finding a new dentist or making an appointment, contact United Concordia. ★

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Add Flossing to Your Dental Care Routine

Do you floss daily? Your dentist has probably asked you this question a few times in your life. And dentists have a good reason to keep asking their patients about their flossing habits. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, flossing once daily is important to maintaining a healthy mouth and strong teeth.

Without flossing, you're missing at least two of each tooth's surfaces, even if you do brush twice a day. Proper flossing can help remove food and plaque from your teeth in areas a toothbrush can't reach, like between your teeth and under your gum line.

If you aren't flossing regularly, start today. Follow these tips to help you start a good flossing routine.

Use the right floss

Have you ever used something other than dental floss to remove food stuck between your teeth? People sometimes use fingernails, folded paper or cardboard, forks or other utensils, safety pins, and even strands of hair to clear the spaces between teeth.

Although using non-dental tools may be common, using anything other than dental floss to clean between your teeth is harmful. Using items other than dental floss could puncture your gums or even cause an accidental tooth fracture.

Don't worry, there are many safe, effective tools made for the job. You can choose from traditional dental floss, dental picks, interdental brushes, and water flossers.

Which flossing tool is right for you? Try different options to see which ones work best for you.

Use proper flossing technique

Flossing may not come as naturally as brushing for many people. But once you master a proper flossing technique, it can help you establish a daily routine. Here's an easy three-step process to help make flossing easier.

1. Loosely wrap 18 inches of dental floss around your middle fingers until you have about 2 inches left between your fingers.
2. Hold floss firmly between your thumbs and index fingers. Gently slide the floss in a "C-shape" up and down between your teeth, working it beneath the gum line on both sides.
3. Move to a clean section of floss and repeat until you have cleaned around each tooth.

Once you finish flossing, remember to rinse your mouth with water or mouthwash. You can floss before or after brushing, in the morning or at bedtime. Just remember to do it once a day.

Your dentist can make sure you're flossing with proper technique. The TRICARE Dental Program covers two routine teeth cleanings and checkups in a consecutive 12-month period. You can also stay up to date on healthy habits throughout the year by visiting www.uccitdp.com. ★





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CHECK THIS OUT ...

Wisdom Teeth and Extraction: When and Why Is It Necessary?

If the time comes to remove your wisdom teeth, TDP has you covered. **See page 2.**



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How to Find Your TDP Costs

Do you know how much you're paying for your TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) benefits? Go to www.uccitdp.com and click "Dental Costs" under the "Benefits" section. Once there, you can find information about your monthly premiums and costs-shares. You'll also learn how much you can save by using a network dentist.



You can also review cost information in the *TRICARE Dental Program Handbook* and *TRICARE Dental Program Brochure* at www.tricare.mil/publications. ★



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