

# Generations of healthy smiles

## The connection between family, genetics and oral health: What you should know



Have you ever seen a family full of healthy smiles? It may not be a coincidence. Here are some surprising facts about the impact family and genetics can have on your oral health.

### Fact #1: Genes may play a role in your risk of dental diseases<sup>1</sup>

Do you have a family history of chronic health conditions, such as heart disease or diabetes? If so, you may also be at an increased risk of dental diseases, such as tooth decay and gum disease.<sup>2</sup> That's because there may be a connection between chronic health conditions and oral health issues.

#### What that means for you

Even if you are at an increased risk of dental diseases based on your family history, that doesn't mean your oral health is completely out of your control. It just means you have to be a little extra diligent.

Here are three simple things you can do to help reduce your risk of dental diseases:

- Practice good oral health habits.
- Know your family history.
- Speak to your dentist about your family history.

### Fact #2: Cavities are contagious<sup>3</sup>

Yes, you read that right. Cavities, or more specifically, the bacteria that causes them, are contagious. Cavities and tooth decay are the same thing: The bacteria that causes them are infectious. This means they can be spread from one person to another, which is especially easy to do among a family.

### Fact #3: Some orthodontic issues can be hereditary.<sup>4</sup>

Tooth crowding, overbites, and underbites are some of the reasons you or a family member might need braces. Often, the need for orthodontic treatment can run in families. Just as traits like eye color or hair color can be inherited, so can orthodontic issues.

#### What that means for you

As with many oral and medical health conditions, early intervention is helpful. In younger patients, an orthodontic check-up by age seven can help identify conditions that make orthodontic treatment more manageable later.<sup>5</sup>



1. CDC. "Oral Health Conditions: Gum (Periodontal Disease)." <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/conditions/index.html>. Page last reviewed: April 6, 2022.

2. Mayo Clinic. "Oral health: A window to your overall health." <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/dental/art-20047475>. October 28, 2021.

3. America's Pediatric Dentists. "Little Teeth Truths: Can cavities be spread through saliva?" <https://www.mychildrensteeth.org/little-teeth-truths-can-cavities-be-spread-through-saliva>. Accessed January 17, 2023.

4. WebMD. "Are Crooked Teeth Genetic?" <https://www.webmd.com/connect-to-care/teeth-straightening/are-crooked-teeth-genetic>. Accessed December 16, 2022. Contains 2020 data from a Journal of International Dental and Medical Research study.

5. American Association of Orthodontists. "The First Visit." <https://www3.aaoinfo.org/blog/parent-s-guide-post/first-visit>. Accessed December 2022.

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