

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**UNDER PRESSURE: HOW STRESS CAN AFFECT YOUR ORAL HEALTH**

***Maintaining good oral-health habits can help you weather the holiday storm***

The holidays are a time for joy and celebration. For some people, however, the season can also be especially stressful. From buying the perfect gifts to hosting the family get-together, stress during this time can have real consequences for our oral health as well as overall well-being.

“People may overlook the effect stress has on our oral health,” says Dr. Harry Höediono, President of the Ontario Dental Association. “However, our mouths can be just as affected by stress as the rest of our bodies are.”

Stress can make people neglect their oral-health routines. They may not brush or floss as often as they should or miss dental appointments. People under stress sometimes make poor lifestyle choices – smoking, consuming too much alcohol and eating more sugary foods – which can lead to serious issues including oral cancer, gum disease or tooth decay.

Stress is a contributing factor to other serious oral-health conditions, including:

- **Bruxism, or teeth grinding.** People under stress may clench or grind their teeth, especially during sleep. Over a long period of time, bruxism can wear down tooth surfaces. Teeth can also become painful or loose from severe grinding or prone to fractures.
- **Temporomandibular disorder (TMD)** affects the jaws joints and groups of muscles that let us chew, swallow, speak and yawn. Symptoms include tender or sore jaw muscles, headaches and problems opening or closing your mouth. Bruxism is a major cause of TMD – clenching your jaw muscles can cause them to ache.
- **Periodontal (gum) disease.** Research has shown that stress affects our immune systems, increasing our susceptibility to infections, including the bacteria that cause gum disease.
- **Xerostomia, or dry mouth,** can also be caused by medications to treat stress. Saliva is vital to keep your mouth moist, wash away food and neutralize the acids that are produced by plaque. Left untreated, dry mouth can damage your teeth.

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It may be impossible to eliminate all stress from your life, but you can take simple steps to reduce its impact on your health.

- Find relaxation techniques to help you cope with stress.
- Brush at least twice a day and floss daily.
- Schedule and keep regular appointments with your dentist. Ask your dentist about getting a custom-fitted nightguard to protect your teeth while you sleep.
- Eat a balanced diet, with plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Stay active. If you don't have time to exercise, a 30-minute walk every day is a good start.
- Get plenty of sleep.

“We deal with stress almost every day of the year, but it does tend to worsen during the holidays,” says Dr. Höediono. “But you can manage it by maintaining healthy routines throughout the year.”

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