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In All Crowning Glory: College Students' Oral Behaviors

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Staff Article

College students all over the world constantly struggle with the pressures of stress and high expectations, which may cause them to stray from their normal routines. Course load pressures can build up during intense times during the semester, like during midterms and finals. One of the first things that students forgo during intensely stressful times is health. Dentists and other health specialists have studied college students' healthcare habits and the resulting health issues they have encountered. Oral health is a huge part of determining overall health, so this is something that has interested me personally. To conduct my research, I decided to take to social media with a variety of polls. The polls asked about the health behaviors of college students' (ranging from undergraduate freshmen to graduate students).

The polls resulted in 203 participants that answered the following questions:

(Q1) Do you brush your teeth twice a day?

(Q2) What kind of toothpaste do you use?

(Q3) Is your oral routine consistent?

(Q4) Do you use whitening strips?

(Q5) When did you last visit your dentist?

(Q6) How many times a week do you feel stressed?

(Q7) How many hours of sleep do you get a night?

Listed below are the results from those questions.

Questions:	Yes	No
Do you brush your teeth twice a day?	136	37
Do you use whitening toothpaste or cavity prevention?	179	24
Do you use whitening strips?	77	126
Are you consistent with your oral routine?	158	45
Did you recently see your dentist?	132	71
Are you stressed 3 or more times a week?	138	75
Do you receive 6 or more hours of sleep in a night?	168	35

All of these questions point toward a correlation between our health and receiving adequate hours of sleep, self-care during stressful times, and treating our teeth correctly. Focusing on dental hygiene, the duration of time brushing your teeth, the number of times your teeth are brushed, and products used are important determinants to keep in mind. In particular, using whitening strips can damage your teeth, which is something people may be unaware of. In a society where looks are

everything and social media runs rampant, we are in a state of comparing every part of ourselves to those of others (1). Although whitening strips can help achieve a whiter smile, it does damage the protein at the bottom layer of the tooth called collagen. The collagen breaks into smaller fragments, which causes various oral issues. Dentists advocate for patients to ask about other alternatives to whitening or asking about treatments that can prevent tooth sensitivity or other problems.

The importance of choosing the proper toothpaste may be another concern that is not fully understood among the public. Some toothpastes may promise whitening, cavity prevention, or promotion of gum health; however, it is important to be aware of the possible outcomes that may arise from these variations. For example, whitening toothpastes can contain abrasive materials that may wear down the enamel, thus causing sensitivity. Being aware of this information, one is able to combat issues by using a soft-bristled toothbrush and making sure to brush gently. Similarly, some cavity prevention toothpastes can have high concentrations of fluoride, which may result in fluorosis and discoloration of the teeth. On the other hand, neglecting to brush your teeth at least two times a day can damage teeth via cavities or more serious complications. Sometimes life happens and we may be forced to skip brushing sessions, but it is important to remember that leaving your teeth unbrushed overnight results in leftover bacteria that can cause plaque buildup and result in cavities. Continual neglect of oral routines can cause gum disease, tooth decay, or other infections.

It is important to be aware of what you use to care for your teeth and how consistent you are with your routine. Increasing the level of attention to your teeth will allow for a better sense of self-esteem. Also, concentration on oral health helps lower the risks of chronic health issues (1). Having minimal care for your teeth can increase the chances of not performing well in the classroom, missing days of school, and having poor habits (2). Even when life gets stressful, self-care is incredibly important in maintaining physical health.

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1. Dewald, L. American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment Spring 2008 Reference Group Data Report (Abridged): The American College Health Association. *Journal of American College Health* 2009, 57 (5), 477–488.
2. Crabtree, R.; Kirk, A.; Moore, M.; Abraham, S. Oral Health Behaviors and Perceptions among College Students. *The Health Care Manager* **2016**, 35 (4), 350–360.

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