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ORIGIN OF
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RISE OF SUGAR

Thanksgiving
PIE SHOWDOWN

How technology is
**TRANSFORMING
DENTISTRY**

fall 2024

in this issue of grin!



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View web-exclusive content, videos, and more!



WELLNESS + NUTRITION
The connection between
menopause and your mouth

Some symptoms of menopause are more well-known than others. Learn more about how menopause can influence your oral health and how to shield your smile.



NEWS + RESEARCH
When should you get your
own dental insurance?

Are you still covered by your parents' dental benefits? It's important to know how long their coverage lasts and how to get your own plan. Let's review the details.



Looking for reasons to smile?

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ON TOPIC WITH DR. DILL

Can stress cause a TMJ disorder?

Joseph Dill, DDS, is Delta Dental's Chief Dental Officer. With more than 35 years of experience in the dental field, including 10 in private and public health practice and 20 in dental insurance, Dr. Dill provides expert insights and helpful advice to keep you smiling bright.

Your temporomandibular joints (TMJ) connect your lower jawbone to your skull. They help you open and close your mouth so you can talk, chew, and more — which is why TMJ disorders can create several problems for your oral and overall health.

Some symptoms of TMJ disorders include:

- Headaches
- Jaw clicking or popping
- Neck pain or soreness
- Bruxism (tooth grinding)
- Earaches
- Tinnitus (a persistent ringing)



Around **5-12%** of people **EXPERIENCE A TMJ DISORDER.**¹

They can be caused by a number of issues that are often associated with high levels of stress.

The stress and TMJ connection

It can be hard to know where stress ends and TMJ disorders begin since one can cause the other. Stress is linked to many physical health symptoms:

- It can cause headaches and autoimmune issues, raising your risk for minor and major illnesses. High levels of cortisol (a hormone released when you feel stressed) can cause high blood pressure.
- Feelings of stress can also cause you to clench or tense your jaw, which can put extra pressure on the joints or pull them out of place. Grinding your teeth can also damage or crack your tooth enamel or crack the tooth itself.

Alternatively, a TMJ disorder can create stress in a number of ways — by disrupting your sleep, distracting your focus while you're awake, or by causing persistent discomfort when you try to eat or talk.

If you feel overwhelmed, it's important to reduce your stress level. There are many ways to do this — try exercise, meditation, yoga, reading, laughing with friends, improving your daily nutrition, and more. Keep looking until you find the right balance for you.



Treating a TMJ disorder

Some TMJ disorders go away in a matter of days or weeks, while others can last several months or years. The problem may go away on its own, or a TMJ disorder may require a visit to your dentist or physician. If you have persistent headaches, jaw pain, or other symptoms of a TMJ disorder, get treatment advice from a medical professional.

Stress less to maintain your oral and overall health

Your oral, overall, and emotional health are all related — the relationship between TMJ disorders and stress is just one example of this. Care for yourself to care for your smile!

¹Matheson, E., Fermo, J., & Blackwelder, R. Temporomandibular Disorders: Rapid Evidence Review. (2023, January) from <https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2023/0100/temporomandibular-disorders.html>

MOUTH-FRIENDLY RECIPE

Pumpkin pie overnight oats

Wake up to the cozy flavors of fall with this creamy, delicious breakfast that's ready and waiting for you in the morning. Packed with fiber-rich oats, vitamin-rich pumpkin, and a sprinkle of cinnamon, this nutritious meal supports oral health while satisfying your seasonal cravings. Dig in!

Ingredients:

- ½ cup old-fashioned rolled oats
- ½ cup almond milk
- ½ teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- ¼ cup canned pumpkin puree
- ½ tablespoon chia seeds
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup
- Pinch of sea salt
- ¼ cup plain Greek yogurt

Directions:

- 1 Combine all ingredients, except toppings if using, and stir together.
- 2 Cover and place in the refrigerator overnight. If you'd like to dig in sooner, let sit in refrigerator for 2 to 4 hours.
- 3 If desired, add your favorite toppings.
- 4 Enjoy!

Topping options:

Pecans, hemp seeds, pepitas, or nut butter



HEALTHY HIGHLIGHTS

Pumpkin
is rich in vitamin C for healthy gums.

Oats
contain phosphorus to help prevent tooth decay.

Cinnamon
has flavonoids to fight inflammation.



Many of us are familiar with oral health basics, like brushing for two minutes twice daily and using fluoride toothpaste. But if you want to further your oral health education, there are a few more tips and tricks to learn.



Close your mouth a bit to reach your back teeth

Cleaning your back molars can be tricky. But it's easier if you remember that your jaw doesn't need to be locked into the same position for the full two minutes you are brushing your teeth.

For many people, closing your mouth a little (instead of opening wider) can help you reach those very back teeth.



Yes, you should floss behind your very back teeth

This area is difficult to reach with the toothbrush and easy to forget, so it's important to floss here, too. Other flossing advice:

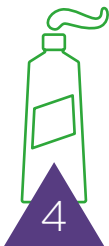
- **Be patient.** Take your time to make sure you're cleaning effectively.
- **Be gentle.** Ease the floss under the gumline gently, then push it against the tooth forming a c-shape around the tooth. Move the floss up and down along the side of each tooth.
- **Be consistent.** Only about 30% of Americans floss daily.¹



Master your electric toothbrush

An electric toothbrush is a great way to clean your teeth, but it is a little different to use than a traditional toothbrush. To make the most of your buzzing brusher:

- **Don't brush back and forth.** The electric toothbrush will take care of that for you!
- **Don't brush as hard as you would with a traditional toothbrush.** This can damage your tooth enamel and cause the bristles to wear down sooner.
- **Remember to replace your toothbrush head every three months or sooner if it starts to fray** — the same as you would a regular toothbrush.



Use a toothpaste for sensitive teeth before, during, and after whitening treatments

Professional and over-the-counter whitening treatments can cause temporary tooth sensitivity. Try using toothpaste for sensitive teeth about two weeks before you start whitening, and continue until you stop treatment (or a little after). If tooth sensitivity persists after you fully stop whitening, consult your dentist.



Educate yourself

Do you have questions about your oral health? Find answers by talking with your dentist or reviewing the information and FAQs at deltadental.com.

¹Fleming, E., Nguyen, D., & Woods, P. Prevalence of daily flossing among adults by selected risk factors for periodontal disease – United States, 2009 – 2014. (2018, August) from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6434526/>



Readers ask, we answer

June asks:
“Does my HSA cover cosmetic dental procedures?”

Have a question you'd like us to answer? Send it to grin@deltadental.com, and it could be featured in an upcoming issue.

Not all health expenses can be paid for using your Health Savings Account (HSA), especially when it comes to cosmetic procedures. In this article, we will explore what you can (and can't) use your HSA cash for.

First things first: What is an HSA?

An HSA is a special type of piggy bank, allowing you to stash away pre-tax dollars to cover certain health expenses. This is helpful in lowering your out-of-pocket health care costs. HSAs are only for individuals with high-deductible health plans, and there are specific guidelines you must follow.

Make sure to do your homework before using your HSA. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is clear on which medical expenses you can use your HSA on. Generally, it can be used for anything that is a necessary medical treatment. This means you can use your HSA for most medical, dental, and vision care expenses. However, cosmetic procedures do not usually make the cut, unless they are medically necessary or for restorative purposes. Using your HSA for non-qualified expenses will incur taxes and possibly a 20% penalty!¹



Fun fact:
Many oral health products, like mouth guards, cold sore treatments, lip balm, and denture adhesive creams, are HSA-eligible. You can check which products are eligible at hsastore.com.

Here is a breakdown of common cosmetic dental procedures and whether you can use your HSA on them:

Orthodontics

Braces, clear aligners, retainers, and other orthodontic treatments are generally HSA-eligible when recommended by an orthodontist or dentist. They qualify because orthodontics correct dental issues, like a misaligned bite.

Teeth whitening

Because teeth whitening is typically seen as a purely cosmetic procedure, it generally does not qualify as an HSA expense.

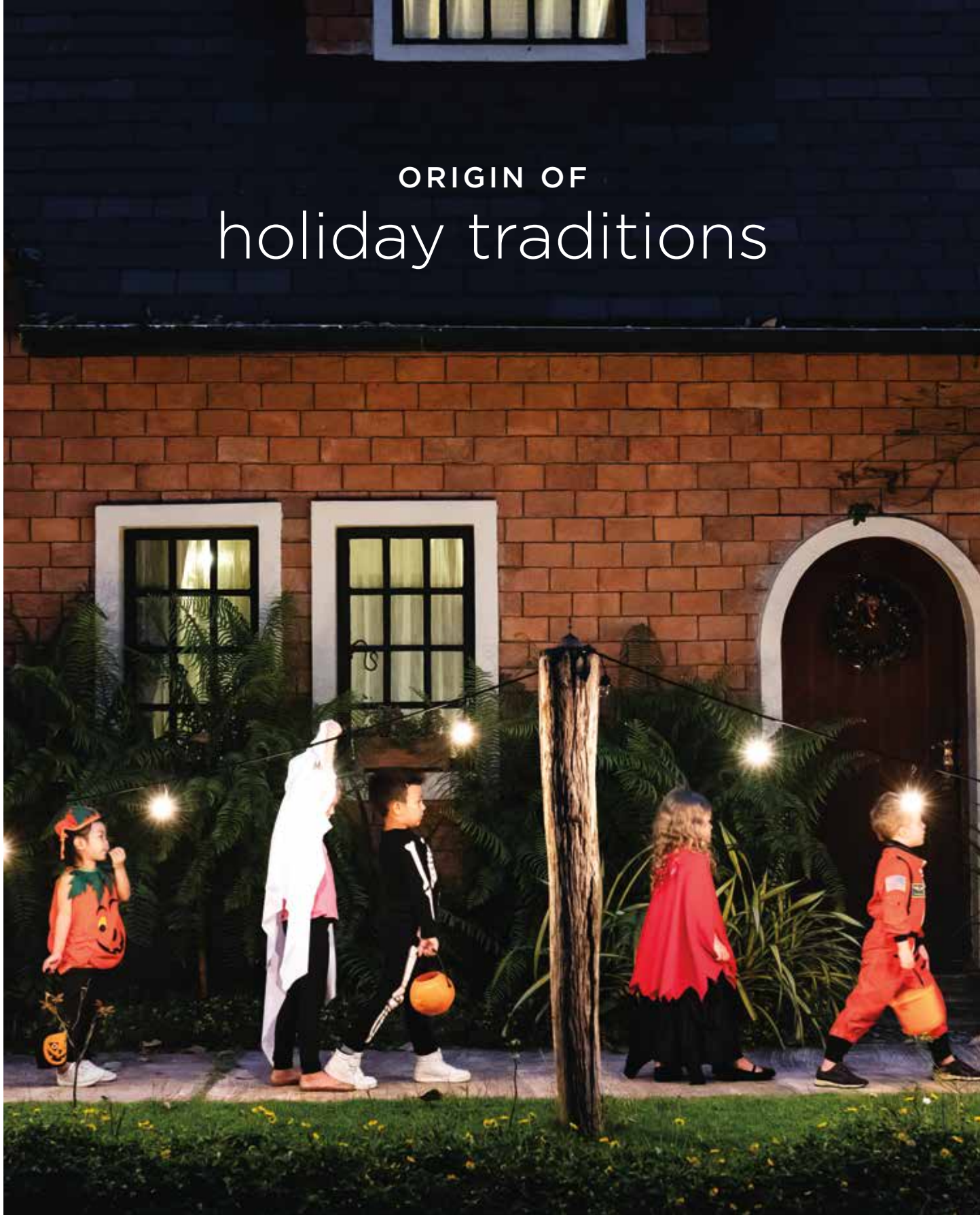
Veneers

A gray area is veneers. If you are getting veneers just to enhance your smile, you will not be able to use your HSA. However, if your dentist recommends veneers to repair damage from an accident or a disease, then it may be eligible.

Your HSA offers many advantages. However, like any financial tool, make sure to follow the rules and regulations. And, if you are ever unsure, talk to an expert.

¹Non-qualified withdrawal with a penalty. (n.d) from <https://hsastore.com/articles/learn-non-qualified-withdrawal-with-a-penalty.html>

ORIGIN OF holiday traditions



If you take the time to think about holiday traditions, some of them start to seem a little odd. Why do we eat candy on Halloween? What does turkey have to do with Thanksgiving? To find the answers, you have to review the history.



Bobbing for apples
Today, bobbing for apples is common during autumn celebrations, But the activity actually began hundreds of years ago, as a courting ritual in Europe. Female bobbars would take turns bobbing for apples that represented different young men. If they got the apple in one bite, supposedly their love was meant to last.

Should you bob for apples to find true love?

Pros: Apples are great for your oral health. They stimulate saliva production to keep your mouth clean and have vitamin C for healthy gums.

Cons: When everyone bobs from the same bucket, you're all exposed to each other's bacteria from saliva and nasal mucus.

We recommend just eating an apple instead.



Trick or treating
Halloween itself can be traced back over two thousand years, to an ancient Celtic festival called Samhain. This celebration included people dressing as ghosts, devils, and other spooky creatures, which are costumes you often still see today! Those in costume would perform in exchange for food and drink — an early form of trick or treating. This practice continued to evolve, eventually introducing the idea of going door to door for gifts of food, money, or drinks from each household.

Protect your oral health from Halloween candy

Drink water after you eat candy to wash down any remaining sugar before it can feed the bacteria in your mouth.

Don't overindulge — have a piece of candy or two at a time (preferably at mealtime, when you are producing more saliva that helps keep your mouth clean).

Remember to brush twice and floss once daily. Sleeping with candy on your teeth is a recipe for plaque and, eventually, tooth decay.

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Turkey for Thanksgiving

A fun fact that may surprise you — turkey wasn’t served at the first Thanksgiving! They likely ate deer, goose, and duck as a main course. But annual meals giving thanks for the harvest were common in colonial times, and by the early 1800s, serving turkey had become popular because it was affordable and plentiful.

It’s a good thing for your smile that turkey became so popular, too. Turkey provides phosphorus and protein, both of which help your body build strong bones and teeth.



Curious about the pros and cons of your favorite holiday pies? Check out our Thanksgiving pie showdown on pages 18-19.



Gingerbread houses

A festive decoration and a sugary treat, gingerbread houses became popular after the 1812 publication of Hansel and Gretel. In that story, two children find a gingerbread house owned by a witch. Because the frosted windows and bright décor of a gingerbread house are reminiscent of Christmas, they gradually became associated with that holiday.

When it comes to health benefits, gingerbread houses could use a little renovation — the cookie (and the frosting used to decorate it) contain a lot of sugar, which can feed the bacteria in your mouth and lead to tooth decay. On the positive side, if you choose to eat a bit of the house before it goes stale or sits out too long, ginger supports healthy gums by reducing inflammation and providing antioxidants.



Exercise your eyes (no gym required)

Ready to give your eyes a little workout? Eye exercises don’t just improve your eyesight, but over time, they can improve the way your eyes work together. This helps you focus when you read and can reduce issues like blurry vision and eye strain.

Let’s try a quick workout

The exercises below are just a few examples. If you notice eye fatigue, especially during the end of the workday, consult your optometrist about the right technique for you!



Near and far focus

This can help train your eyes to focus and relax properly. To complete the exercise:

- 1 Hold your thumb about 10 inches from your face.
- 2 Focus your eyes on your thumb for 15 seconds.
- 3 Switch your focus to something about 10 to 20 feet away.
- 4 Focus on it for 15 seconds.
- 5 Return your focus to your thumb and repeat this five times.



Figure 8

A slightly trickier exercise, this one can help your eyes track moving objects. Begin from a seated position and:

- 1 Pick a point on the floor to focus on.
- 2 Keeping your head still, trace an imaginary “figure 8” with your eyes.
- 3 Continue for 30 seconds.
- 4 Trace the figure 8 again, this time in the opposite direction.
- 5 Continue for 30 seconds.



Pencil pushups

These pushups are less tiring than actual pushups and can improve your eyes’ ability to focus on nearby objects. To give it a try:

- 1 Hold a pencil at arm’s length.
- 2 Focus your eyes on the pencil and slowly move it toward your nose. As you do this, try to keep the pencil a single image.
- 3 Continue moving the pencil toward your nose until it splits into a double image.
- 4 Start over with the pencil at arm’s length.
- 5 Repeat the exercise several times.



The 20-20-20 rule

This isn’t an exercise but it does help prevent eye strain, especially if you work at a computer all day. It’s also easy! Every 20 minutes you’re using a screen, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds. To maximize your results, use big, exaggerated blinks — this helps the oil in your eyelids spread over the tear layer of your cornea.



Did you know? You can get vision benefits through Delta Dental in most states.

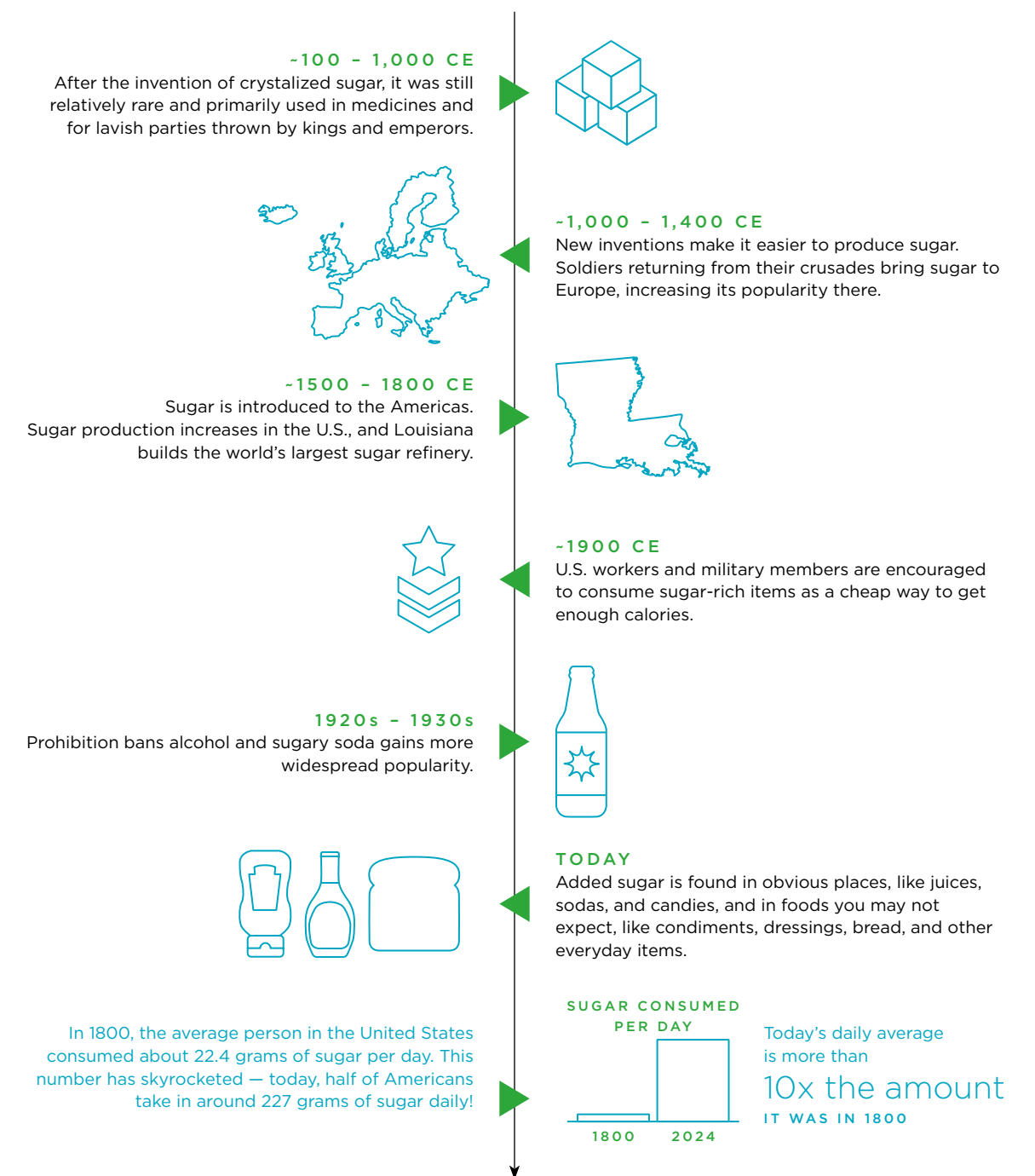
The bittersweet RISE OF SUGAR

From Halloween candies and pumpkin-spiced coffees to holiday cookies and pies, it's easy to feel surrounded by sugar. But sweets weren't always so common — in fact, sugar consumption has risen substantially in recent history, despite warnings about the oral and overall health risks.



A timeline of sugar consumption

The widespread availability of sugar is relatively new. For most of history, humans only found sugar in honey, maple syrup, fruit, and other naturally occurring sweet foods. Then, almost 2,000 years ago, crystalized sugar was invented — and consumption of sugar has been on the rise ever since.



Sugar isn't sweet for your smile

A sugar-rich diet feeds the bacteria in your mouth, causing them to multiply and produce acid that demineralizes your teeth. Over time, this will cause tooth decay, gum disease, and other oral health problems.

Too much sugar also contributes to overall health problems, including weight gain, diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. But remember, all of these risks can be reduced by maintaining a healthy sugar intake!

Continued from page 13



How to reduce your sugar intake

Despite the widespread availability of sugar, it is possible to eat and drink less of it. Here are a few small ways to reduce your intake over time:



Find healthy substitutes: For instance, you could sweeten oatmeal with fresh fruit instead of a spoonful of sugar. You'll consume less sugar and more nutrition to support a healthy smile!



Read nutrition labels: Pay attention to how much sugar you're eating throughout the day so you don't accidentally consume too much. The recommended daily allowance for added sugar is 36 grams per day for men and 25 grams per day for women.



Watch your beverage: Sweetened juices and sodas can quickly push you over your daily limit and constantly expose your teeth to sugar, which will lead to plaque and, eventually, cavities. Choosing water is a quick way to reduce your sugar consumption. It also helps wash down remaining food to keep your mouth clean!

Shield your smile with daily oral health

No matter how much sugar you consume, a great way to keep your smile strong is attending your regular dental cleanings and maintaining a healthy daily routine:



Brush your teeth twice (for two minutes each time) and floss once daily.



Use a soft-bristled toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste.



Reach the entire surface of each tooth, with your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle to your gumline.

Everyone enjoys the occasional treat — but keeping your smile healthy is pretty sweet, too! Enjoy treats in moderation and maintain healthy daily habits for a lifetime of oral health.

Your FALL smile list



- 1 Learn to knit and try making a cozy scarf.
- 2 Create an autumn wreath to hang on your front door.
- 3 Swap out your sweaters and donate any you don't wear.
- 4 Reconnect with an old friend by sending a handwritten sentiment.
- 5 Dive into the history of fall traditions. See our article on page 9.
- 6 Wake up to some yummy overnight oats! See our recipe on page 5.
- 7 Perfect your favorite soup recipe.
- 8 Cozy up to an outdoor firepit and enjoy the fall sounds around you.
- 9 Plant fall flowers to brighten your porch.
- 10 Run or walk a turkey trot 5k.



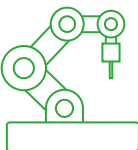
//////////////////// DENTAL TREND SPOTLIGHT //////////////////////

How technology is transforming dentistry

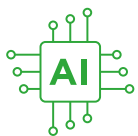
Technological advancements have been transforming health care, and dentistry is no different. New cutting-edge technologies like 3D printing, robotics, and artificial intelligence (AI) are revolutionizing dental care, making procedures faster, less painful, and sometimes even more affordable.



3D printing
3D printers allow dentists to create precise and personalized dental implants, crowns, and even dentures right in the office. This not only speeds up the entire process, but also improves the accuracy and fit of these pieces. Plus, it's usually more affordable.



Robotic dental surgery
Robotic dental surgery is currently being developed and involves robotic systems that assist in surgical procedures. These systems enhance precision and control during operations, which may reduce human error and improve patient outcomes. The vision for robotics in dental surgery in the future will allow dentists to perform complex procedures with enhanced visibility and accuracy.



Artificial intelligence (AI)
Like most industries, AI is making headway in dentistry. Most notably, AI is used to enhance diagnostic precision since AI algorithms can analyze dental imaging faster and often more accurately than human eyes, identifying issues such as cavities, bone loss, or even early signs of oral cancers. This leads to earlier and more effective interventions.



Smart toothbrushes
Smart toothbrushes incorporate technology that connects to mobile apps. These toothbrushes provide feedback on brushing habits, monitoring areas you consistently miss, the pressure you apply, and the duration of brushing, providing personalized data and tips for better dental care routines. This data can then be shared with your dentist to enhance the personalized brushing insights in the app.

Our verdict: Each of these technologies bring unique advantages to the dental field, revolutionizing traditional methods and improving patient experiences. Maybe you will even experience some of these incredible advancements first-hand!

What is open enrollment?

For many people, it's open enrollment season — but what does that actually mean? Open enrollment is important because it's typically the only time of year when you can sign up for or make changes to a health, dental, or vision plan provided by your employer. You can also make changes during the year if you have a qualifying life event, like changing jobs, getting married, or having a baby.



When is open enrollment?

Open enrollment for employer-provided benefits frequently occurs in the fall, but the specific dates will vary. A few things to keep in mind when shopping for individual or family health, dental, and vision benefit plans on your own:

- Enrollment dates for Affordable Care Act (ACA) plans can vary, with most states opening from November 1 to January 15.
- Medicare's open enrollment typically runs from October 15 to December 7 each year.
- You can purchase an individual or family plan from independent benefit providers (like Delta Dental) at any time.

What happens during open enrollment?

During open enrollment, you can:

- Sign up for new benefits.
- Change coverage for your existing benefits.
- Start, stop, or adjust how much you contribute to a health savings account (HSA) or flexible spending account (FSA).
- Keep or change your current health, dental, and vision insurance plans.

Tips for choosing your dental or vision benefits

It's important to pick the right dental and vision plans because having these benefits will help keep you and your family healthy. Here are a few tips to help you decide:



Assess your current needs. The right plan for you will be based on your current age, health, and family situation.



Compare available plans. Review differences in what each plan covers.



Review your budget. Consider how much you will pay in premiums, your deductible, how the plan handles co-payments, and the annual maximum.



Check the network size. Will your current dentist or optometrist still be covered? Will you have affordable access to care on vacation or while traveling for work?



Make sure you have coverage for routine, preventive visits. Early detection is important for maintaining your oral and overall health, which is why most Delta Dental plans cover them 100%.

Don't miss out on open enrollment

Whether you choose a benefits plan through your employer or purchase your own, open enrollment season is a perfect opportunity to take stock of your current health, dental, and vision benefits. Weigh your options and make sure you and your family have the coverage you need!

Did you know that Delta Dental offers vision coverage in many states? Learn more at deltadental.com.



Thanksgiving PIE SHOWDOWN

Thanksgiving is a time for people across the country to show gratitude for friends, family, and the things that make life special. This holiday is not only a feast for the soul but a literal feast, including the traditional indulgence of pies. Let's explore how popular Thanksgiving pies influence your health — and yes, even your teeth. Grab a fork, and let's dig in.

While pies can enhance a Thanksgiving meal, they also bring something else to the table: sugar!

The bacteria in your mouth love to feast on the sugars found in these festive treats, which can lead to cavities. And that flaky crust that we all love? That breaks down into sugar and can cause tooth decay, too. That does not mean you need to skip your slice of pie this Thanksgiving. To reduce sugar intake, consider swapping regular whipped cream topping with sugar-free. And after eating pie, drink water to help wash away sugars.



Pumpkin pie

This pie is more than just tasty — it's a holiday icon! Fortunately, this dessert is not all bad for you either. While it does contain a lot of added sugar, pumpkin pie is packed with fiber and carotenoids, which are antioxidants that protect you from disease and improve your immune system.

Apple pie

This true American classic, apple pie is often a Thanksgiving favorite. Wrapped in a flaky, buttery crust, its layers of cinnamon-spiced apples are simply irresistible. Thankfully, it's rich in fiber, vitamins A and C, and antioxidants to support your gut, immune system, and health overall. Fun fact: vitamin A is essential in keeping your eyes healthy.



Sweet potato pie

A southern classic, sweet potato pie is a healthier alternative to most pies. Sweet potato pie notably has vitamins A and C, fiber, minerals, and antioxidants, promoting strong teeth and a healthy body. It is not completely guilt-free though, as it's sweetened up with sugar and spices.

Key lime pie

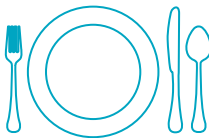
Key lime pie brings a tangy and refreshing twist to the dessert table. While it provides some vitamin C thanks to its citrus content, it typically contains a high amount of sugar, too. For your teeth, specifically, watch out for all that citrus, as it's acidic and can erode your tooth enamel.



Pecan pie

Pecan pie remains a Thanksgiving staple in many homes. It's packed with sugars and syrups, making it its most indulgent pie on this list. But don't worry, it is not all bad. Pecans have a lot of health benefits. They contain vitamins A and E, polyphenols, and even calcium — a mineral your teeth will especially appreciate. Pecans also have been shown to lower cholesterol.

Enjoying pies in moderation, alongside proper dental care, ensures that these treats remain part of a healthy, happy holiday. Savor each bite and remember to take care of your teeth afterward. Happy Thanksgiving!





COMMISSIONED BY DELTA DENTAL

THE 2024 STATE OF AMERICA'S ORAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS REPORT

With fresh facts about fresh smiles, our annual report is full of interesting insights about how — and why — we all care for our teeth and gums.

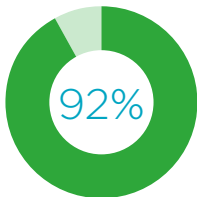
Beyond the numbers, Delta Dental experts will explain what this data means and why it's OK to feel optimistic about America's oral health.

More and more Americans understand oral health's vital role in overall health.

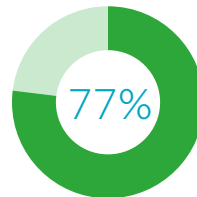
An overwhelming 91% of adults believe that their dental visit is as important as an annual physical.



Great oral health provides peace of mind



of adults believe taking action to protect their oral health allows them to be more confident.



of adults say oral health is closely connected to mental well-being



Parents continue to prioritize getting dental coverage for their children.

Nearly 9 in 10 parents report that their children are covered.

For more up-to-date insights about consumer behaviors relating to oral health, download the full report at deltadental.com.