

# The Benefits of Mouthwash

Mouthwash has a variety of uses, from freshening breath to preventing tooth decay. Swishing daily with mouthwash can help you maintain great oral health by killing the germs and bacteria that linger in your mouth and between your teeth. Learn more about the various types of mouthwash and how you can use them to improve your overall oral health.

## What is mouthwash?

Mouthwash, also known as mouthrinse, is an oral hygiene product that you can use in addition to brushing and flossing. Generally, these oral rinses are classified as cosmetic, therapeutic, or a combination of both.

Cosmetic mouthwashes can remove oral debris, temporarily suppress bad breath, and refresh the mouth with a pleasant taste. In addition to these benefits, therapeutic mouthwashes—including antiseptic, anti-plaque, and anti-cavity formulas—include ingredients to protect against oral disease. Antiseptic and anti-plaque mouthwashes can kill the germs that cause plaque, gingivitis, and bad breath, while anti-cavity formulas use fluoride to prevent and reduce tooth decay.

## What are the benefits of mouthwash?

Research shows that using a germ-killing mouthwash in addition to brushing your teeth can reduce plaque and gingivitis more than brushing alone. Additionally, anti-cavity mouthwashes with fluoride

have been clinically proven to fight up to 50 percent more of the bacteria that cause cavities. However, cosmetic mouthwashes that aren't formulated to kill germs do not provide these cavity-fighting benefits.

## How do I use mouthwash?

First, make sure that you brush and floss your teeth well. Your teeth should be as clean as possible in order to reap the full benefits of your mouthwash.

Once you're ready to rinse, measure the proper amount as specified on the container, or as instructed by your dentist. With your lips closed and your teeth apart, swish the liquid around your mouth. Many formulas suggest swishing for 30 seconds or more. Finally, thoroughly spit the liquid from your mouth. If you're using an anti-cavity mouthwash, do not rinse, eat, or smoke for 30 minutes after use. Otherwise, you'll dilute the fluoride and rinse it away. If you smoke, consider asking your dentist or physician for advice on how to quit.

## Does mouthwash have any side effects?

Side effects may vary, depending on which formula you use. If you experience any irritating or adverse reactions to mouthwash, immediately stop using it and speak with your dentist.

Most anti-cavity rinses contain sodium fluoride, which can lead to fluoride toxicity if taken excessively or swallowed. Because



children tend to swallow mouthwash accidentally, they should not use anti-cavity formulas before age 6, and children older than age 6 should use them only with adult supervision.

## Where can I get mouthwash?

Most mouthwashes are available over the counter. However, dentists can prescribe special formulas for patients with more severe oral problems, including cavities, periodontal disease, gum inflammation, and xerostomia (dry mouth). Talk to your general dentist to see what's right for you.

For more information on mouthwash and other oral health topics, visit [KnowYourTeeth.com](http://KnowYourTeeth.com).



## KnowYourTeeth.com

Brought to you by the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD), this website answers important dental health questions, offers the latest information on current treatments, provides tips for first-rate oral hygiene, and helps visitors find highly qualified general dentists near where they live.

**The AGD is a member of the Partnership for Healthy Mouths, Healthy Lives, a first-of-its-kind national dental coalition composed of 37 leading dental health organizations. Look for more information about the Kids' Healthy Mouths campaign at [www.2min2x.org](http://www.2min2x.org).**

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