



What Your Family History Says About Your Teeth

DNA is the building blocks of our bodies. Our DNA is a mixture of our mother and father's DNA. Has anyone ever told you that you have your father's nose or your mother's eyes? DNA affects everything from our skin and hair color to our height and shoe size, but it can also affect how brilliant of a smile we have.

That's because when it comes to your oral health, your own family history might play a role. In addition to your own oral health habits and lifestyle factors, your own genetics can also impact your oral health.

Sometimes the traits that are passed down to you from your parents might make you more prone to cavities or gum disease. The way parents take care of their smiles can also impact the way their children might take care of their mouths.

What Aspects of Our Smile Does DNA Affect?

While the health of your smile can certainly be influenced by good dental habits and diet, there are a few concerns that can be attributed to your DNA:

- **Overcrowded or crooked teeth** – Having crooked teeth tends to run in the family. The size of an individual's jaw is passed down through genetics and can cause gaps in teeth or overcrowding.
- **Gum disease** – While gum disease can be the result of poor dental hygiene, it's also a common issue for diabetics. Having a history of diabetes in your family could put you at a higher risk of developing gum disease.
- **Oral cancer** – Smoking, drinking and poor nutrition put you at risk for oral cancer. But for some people, genetics also play a role. If your family has a history of oral cancer, it's important to visit your dentist regularly for routine screenings. Your dentist can detect signs of oral cancer in its earliest stages, before it becomes more serious.
- **Tooth decay** – If you're someone who struggles with cavities even though you brush and floss twice a day and never skip your dentist visits, it could be due to genetics.

Learned Behaviors

The habits we develop when we're young can affect us throughout our lives. Watching parents or caregivers follow a healthy dental hygiene routine each day can help kids create positive habits that will stick with them as they grow older. For example, if caregivers brush and floss every single day and visit the dentist regularly, their children will be more likely to follow the same pattern.

As you watch the video with your class, you could consider asking your class to think about their own family members and their smiles. Can your class identify anything that is similar between their mouths and their family members' mouths?

For more dental health educational resources, go to www.healthysmilelearning.org. Healthy Smile Learning is an outreach effort of Arizona PBS on behalf of the Delta Dental Institute.