

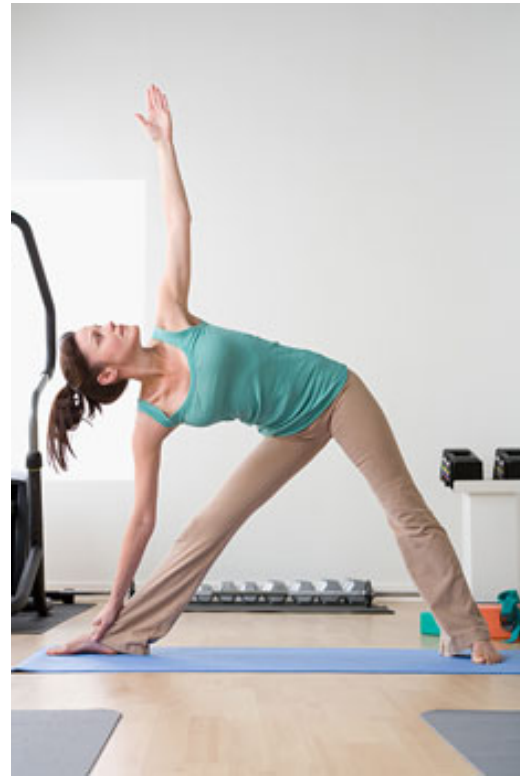
## De-Stress for Better Oral Health

A furrowed brow, a tense look, a fresh acne breakout — you can often tell on sight when someone's under pressure. If you could look into a stressed-out person's mouth, you might learn even more of their story.

### Stress and Your Mouth: What's the Connection?

More and more researchers have been studying the link between stress and gum disease. When you're anxious or depressed, your body produces more of the hormone cortisol. This compound harms your teeth and gums, contributing to the risk for periodontal (gum) disease.

There's also evidence that stress and depression impair your immune system, making chronic infection throughout your body — including in your mouth — more likely. In addition, hard times lead to bad-for-your-teeth habits. These include smoking, drinking alcohol, and skipping your nightly brushing and flossing.



The following dental conditions also have been linked to stress, depression, or anxiety:

- Burning mouth syndrome. This a painful condition that sufferers describe as a scalding feeling in the tongue, lips, and roof of the mouth.
- Canker sores. Small, painful ulcers develop inside the mouth. Doctors aren't sure what causes canker sores, but they are thought to appear more often when the individual is stressed or very tired.
- Cold sores. These fluid-filled blisters are caused by the herpes virus. If you're infected, you'll often experience an outbreak in response to being upset.
- Bruxism. People who grind their teeth (a problem called bruxism) tend to do it more when under stress. Grinding can wear and chip teeth and put pressure on jaw muscles and joints.
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### Ways to Relieve the Pressure

Don't let your mouth take the brunt of your stress. Try positive stress-reducing techniques instead. Here are some strategies:

- Change your outlook. Some things, like the weather, are out of your hands and for that reason are not worth getting worked up about. Try to see other life events as positive challenges rather than threats.
- Keep your body healthy. Eat a nutritious, well-balanced diet and get enough sleep. And exercise on a regular basis. Not only will you get in shape and feel

better overall, you'll release anxiety and produce mood-boosting brain chemicals.

- Practice relaxation techniques. These include meditation, stretching, and deep breathing and progressive relaxation of muscle groups.

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