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Don't fight tooth decay alone. Use CU Health Plan's four no-cost cleanings a year [1]

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There's a battle taking place in your mouth and proper dental hygiene, including routine visits to the dentist, can help the good guys win. Luckily, CU Health Plan dental members have an ally in their efforts to fight tooth decay – four cleaning visits a year [3] and services at no cost.

So what exactly is happening in your mouth? Millions of microorganisms are trying to colonize your teeth – some good, some bad and most benign. You might know these clusters of bacteria by their commonplace collective moniker: plaque.

"You can't get away from having bacteria in your mouth, but if you disrupt it with dental hygiene, then the plaque doesn't get to mature into a colony," said Cary Clifton, longtime dental researcher and professor at the University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine [4].

Once plaque has an opportunity to set up shop, get comfortable and stay a while, that's when the damage begins. Typically, the earliest colonizers are the good guys, the bad bunch comes about later.

It's important to evict the bad bacteria before it can do its damage. Without proper and regular care, you may begin to experience pain, inflammation, root decay or even tooth loss. And the effects only compound over time. If you don't take care of your teeth now, they'll be weaker later, and if you have dental work done at a young age, you may need to have that work redone when you're older.

"You need professional help. The one thing we know that works is routine, supportive care," said Dr. Lonnie Johnson, professor and senior associate dean of clinics and professional practice at the University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine [4]. He wants CU Health Plan members to know that everyone has different needs but everyone needs care.

Luckily, CU Heath Plan – Essential Dental and Health Plan – Choice Dental provide an array of no-cost preventative and diagnostic services. That includes two oral exams, two bitewing x-rays per year, and those four cleanings – two of which can be periodontal cleanings. Plus, employee-only coverage on the Essential plan is offered for a $0 monthly premium.

Depending on your plan, children are offered a variety of sealants for molars, preventative resin restoration, two annual fluoride treatments, space maintainers and other services covered at no cost. For children under age 13, the Right Start 4 Kids program covers dental services at 100 percent, up to the annual maximum and certain limitations.

You might not need to take advantage of all of these services, but by visiting your dentist you can make a plan and determine how many you need.

Ultimately, it's about more than a clean mouth. When you lose teeth, you lose quality of life. It can become hard to enjoy your favorite foods. Social outings can become awkward if you're afraid to flash a smile. And people who lose too many teeth may end up with a lower life expectancy.

There are so many benefits to maintaining dental hygiene that it seems silly to turn down free assistance. "At the end of the day, it's money in the bank. I use this free benefit, and I don't have to spend my money on fillings and dental visits," Johnson said.

To get learn more about your dental plan by visiting the Employee Services Website [3].

benefits [5], dental [6]

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