

# Dental checkups are necessary even for faithful flossers

**Dear Doctor K: I take good care of my teeth, brushing and flossing regularly. Do I still need to have regular dental checkups?**

Dear Reader: Even if you brush your teeth three times a day and floss daily, regular checkups with a dental professional are a must.

For most people, two checkups per year are enough. That's what I have. Routine visits usually include a professional cleaning, an exam and possibly



**Ask Dr. K.**  
Dr. Anthony L. Komaroff

X-rays.

Professional cleaning rids your teeth of tartar. This thick stuff can build up in places that are hard to reach with a toothbrush. Or in places that are easy to reach with a toothbrush — if you don't regularly use a

toothbrush!

If tartar is not removed, it can lead to cavities and tooth decay.

During the cleaning, the dentist or hygienist might use a small metal instrument with a bladelike end to scrape off tartar above and below the gum line.

He or she will look for signs of decay, using a metal probe and a small mirror with an angled handle. The dentist will check for gum disease by examining your gums for swelling and redness and by measuring the spaces between the teeth and the gums.

Your dentist will test

how your upper and lower teeth come together. He or she will look for evidence of tooth grinding, or problems with the joint that connects the lower jaw to the skull. The dentist will also check for signs of infection and oral cancer. Finally, your dentist will look for clues as to whether problems in your mouth are actually symptoms of other diseases in the body.

Virtually everyone who visits the dentist will have X-rays taken at some point. Teeth, bones, fillings and

restorations appear lighter because they block more of the X-rays than soft tissue. Decayed or swollen, pus-filled areas around teeth appear darker than healthy teeth.

X-rays are valuable for uncovering problems in places that can't easily be seen — cavities inside and between the teeth, for example.

They can also show wisdom teeth that have failed to come through the gum and bone deterioration below the gum line.

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This cartoon gives me the chills.

**Shortcuts**  
by Jeff Harris

This edition of Shortcuts is sponsored by Flake Shelton.

Where do snowflakes go to dance?  
To a snowball.

I think I'm the coolest guy on "The Voice."

What did the snowflake say to his girlfriend?  
I'm falling for you.

Wilson Bentley was one of the first people to photograph snowflakes. Starting in the 1880s, he took more than 5,000 photographs of snowflakes, earning him the nickname "Snowflake Man."

Nearly all snowflakes have six sides, but some may have as few as three sides or as many as 12.

A falling snowflake may take several hours to finally reach the ground.

Can you help this snowflake get to school?

A single snowflake may contain hundreds of snow crystals.

What do snowflakes do on the weekend?  
Chill out.

Some of the first studies of snowflakes were carried out in the 1600s by scientists such as Johannes Kepler, Rene Descartes and Robert Hooke.

**WORD SEARCH**  
Can you find the hidden words? Search carefully because some words are backward or diagonal.

AGGREGATE SIX GUESS WHAT NEXT  
DENDRITE ICE SAT TIT LEAST AST  
COLUMN FALL NOAD PEEBIFUND  
CRYSTAL BOB OUGELY LRFDAXC  
STELLAR SIDES WMESANDLLEFLO  
NEEDLE DUST CORDT NEXAKBWL  
DEBRIS FLAKE LOGO ESEKROXU  
CLOUD FORM OGGDFUNNEIIBM  
PLATE SNOW ULATSYRCASCAN  
DARLINGOLFEEET

What does snow eat for breakfast?  
Frosted Flakes.

Snow crystals have six sides because the water molecules inside them link to form six-sided structures.

Snowflakes are created high in the atmosphere when microscopic ice crystals form around tiny bits of dust and debris. Individual crystals then join with hundreds of other crystals to form a snowflake. The countless variations of snowflakes created by this process means that the saying "No two snowflakes are alike" is a fairly realistic statement.

**THE BIG CHILL**  
Most individual snowflakes are less than 1 cm (0.39 in.) in diameter, but some can measure nearly 2 cm (3/4 in.) across. An "aggregate" snowflake is formed when several snowflakes join together. The largest aggregate snowflakes can measure more than 10 cm (4 in.) in diameter.

**LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE**  
There are several different types of snow crystals. The type of crystal that forms in a cloud depends on several factors, including the temperature and the amount of moisture in the cloud.

Plate

Stellar

Column

Needle

Spatial Dendrite

Capped Column

**SNOWFLAKES**

SEARCHING FOR

Can you help this snowflake get to school?

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For more information, check out these books: "Snowflake Bentley" by Jacqueline Martin and Mary Azarian (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) or "The Snowflake: Winter's Secret Beauty" by Kenneth Libbrecht and Patricia Rasmussen (Voyageur Press).