

mouth how-tos

2 CALM CANKERS These benign yet painful sores often have no identifiable cause, but they tend to pop up when you're stressed. To ease the annoying ache, dab a topical pain reliever such as Anbesol or Orajel directly on the spot. If you're in serious discomfort, your dentist may be able to zap the sore with a soft-tissue laser, which eliminates the canker altogether, says Lana Rozenberg, D.D.S., owner of the Rozenberg Dental Day Spa in New York City. It costs \$100 to \$150, and insurance plans usually cover it.

3 FRESHEN UP Not sure if your breath is up to par? This quick test will spare your loved ones: Swipe a cotton ball or gauze pad over the back of your tongue, where bacteria congregate. Take a whiff. If it doesn't smell sweet, brush your teeth and the back of your tongue to remove the odor-causing culprits. You can skip mouthwash. It only temporarily masks the problem—and could make bad breath come back with a vengeance. Most mouthwashes contain alcohol, which dries the gums and reduces saliva flow. The result? Germs multiply and have a party in your mouth. Bad breath can be more than just unattractive, though; chronic halitosis may be a sign

that something is medically wrong. Certain health problems leave an unpleasant odor in your mouth. If brushing doesn't help, see your dentist.

4 MAKE ROOM IN THE BACK Most people miss the highly cavity-prone areas far in the back of the mouth when brushing. For easier access, open your mouth only slightly. Go too wide and your cheeks get in the way.

5 REMEMBER THE F WORD We mean floss, of course. Maybe if you knew why your dentist bugs you, you'd do it already: "Toothbrush bristles can get only as far as 1 millimeter underneath the gum line," Dr. Rozenberg says. "But gum pockets are deeper than that—about 3 or 4 millimeters. If you don't floss, food sits in these pockets, bacteria feeds off it and then you'll have decaying teeth and potential jawbone loss." In fact, 80 percent of adults have some form of gum disease, which can cause teeth to fall out. You've got nothing to lose by not flossing except your gorgeous grin. —Rachel Grumman



Too much of a good thing

WHEN HEALTHY HABITS GO OVERBOARD

Eat carrots,
but not the
whole bunch!

You can never have enough emotional support, unconditional love, shoes—you know, the biggies. But there is such a thing as going too far with being healthy. Get the most out of your good-for-you practices without crossing the line.

•**Avoid fiber overload** If you ingest more than 50 grams of fiber a day, you could be headed for trouble, says Samantha Heller, R.D., of New York University Medical Center in New York City. "Fiber increases the speed at which food moves through the intestinal tract," Heller says. "If you

have too much, there's not enough time for the body to absorb minerals such as calcium, zinc and iron." Shoot for 25 to 35 grams a day, Heller says. Which leaves room for nonfibrous treats like chocolate pudding!

•**Brush, don't scour** Pressing too hard for too long can shrink gums and damage enamel, according to research from the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne in England. Brush for two minutes (no more), and lighten your grip.

•**Sleep, yes; hibernate, no** Trying to make up for more

than two hours of lost slumber over the weekend will likely backfire, says Milton Braunstein, M.D., a specialist at the Coral Springs Sleep Disorders Center in Florida. Oversleeping by even a few hours produces the same symptoms as exhaustion: reduced alertness, poor concentration and slower reflexes. To prevent grogginess, keep your sleep schedule as consistent as possible.

—Meryl Davids Landau