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12 things your dentist knows just by looking in your mouth

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While cavities and plaque build-up may be what's on your mind before a teeth cleaning, your dentist is looking for a whole lot more. "The mouth is the window to the body," says David Silverstrom, DDS, of The Silverstrom Group in Livingston, NJ. "Often, diseases like cancer, anemia and diabetes will first be identified by the dentist in a regular examination, and this saves lives." And it's not just diseases — dentists can discover everything from your bad habits to your favorite beverages simply by asking you to say, "Ahh!"

You flossed right before your appointment — and that's the only time.

You may have an eating disorder.

"Many patients are surprised that their dentist is the first one to ask about eating disorders," says Chase, "but bulimia exhibits a very distinct pattern of tooth wear that your dentist can easily identify." Stephenson notes that, "This erosion happens almost exclusively on the tongue-side of the front teeth and can contribute to increased cavities." But Silverstrom is quick to point out that acid erosion on the back of a patient's teeth does not always indicate an eating disorder. He says other possibilities include acid reflux and the use of antidepressants or mood-elevating drugs, both of which reduce the amount of saliva in the mouth, thereby upping the odds of acid damage.