

# Smiles as currency: Why oral health is the new social capital in a changing world

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In today's fast-paced and interconnected world, the power of a smile goes beyond aesthetics. It's a universal language that transcends cultural barriers, a tool for building trust and, increasingly, a form of social capital. While we often think of oral health as a personal matter, its implications ripple through our social, professional and even digital lives. In this article, we explore why maintaining a healthy smile is more important than ever and how it's shaping our future.

## The confidence connection

A smile is often the first thing people notice. It's a non-verbal cue that conveys warmth, confidence and approachability. In the workplace, this can be a game-changer. Studies have shown that people with healthy smiles are perceived as more competent, trustworthy and successful. Whether you're leading a team, interviewing for a job or networking at an event, your smile can set the tone for positive interactions.

But the confidence that comes with a healthy smile isn't just about perception. It's deeply personal. When individuals feel good about their oral health, they're more likely to engage socially, take risks and pursue opportunities they might otherwise avoid. A healthy smile becomes a key to unlocking potential – both personal and professional.

## The digital age of smiles

In the age of social media, where photos and videos dominate communication, the significance of a healthy smile has reached new heights. Platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok are increasingly visual, and a smile has become an essential part of one's online presence. It's not just influencers or public figures who benefit; professionals across industries are curating their digital identities, and a confident, healthy smile often plays a starring role.

Beyond personal branding, smiles have become symbols of authenticity and relatability online. A genuine smile can humanise brands, build stronger connections with audiences and even influence purchasing decisions. In this context, oral health is no longer just a private concern; it's a public asset.

## The hidden costs of neglect

While the benefits of a healthy smile are clear, the consequences of neglecting oral health can be profound. Poor oral health doesn't just lead to physical discomfort; it can result in social withdrawal, reduced self-esteem and missed opportunities. In South Africa, where access to quality dental care is still uneven, this issue takes on a societal dimension. For many, the barriers to achieving a healthy smile – from financial constraints to a lack of awareness – are significant.



As a leader in the dental community, SADA is committed to addressing these challenges. By advocating for accessible dental care and promoting preventive measures, we aim to empower South Africans to take charge of their oral health and, in turn, their social capital.

## Investing in your smile

So, how can individuals ensure their smile becomes an asset? It starts with the basics: regular brushing and flossing, a balanced diet and routine dental check-ups. But beyond these fundamentals, there's a need to shift our mindset. Oral health isn't just about avoiding cavities; it's about investing in yourself.

Employers and organisations can also play a role by prioritising oral health in their wellness programmes. By providing dental benefits and raising awareness, they can contribute to a healthier, more confident workforce – and, ultimately, a more productive one.

## A future built on smiles

As we navigate a rapidly changing world, one thing remains constant: the power of a smile. It's a symbol of connection, a marker of confidence and a currency that holds value across every aspect of life. By prioritising oral health, we're not just improving individual lives; we're building stronger communities, fostering inclusion and creating a brighter future for all.

At SADA, we believe that every South African deserves the opportunity to harness the power of their smile. Together, let's redefine oral health as more than just a personal responsibility – let's embrace it as a collective investment in our shared humanity.