

DENTAL CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

It's really important to look after our teeth and gums as we get older – it affects our general health and how we feel day to day. A healthy mouth allows people to eat, speak, and socialize without pain, discomfort or embarrassment. Tooth decay (dental caries) and gum (periodontal) disease, can mostly be avoided or cured if we prevent it early. There is evidence that poor oral health is linked to many other health problems. Eating the wrong foods can lead to losing teeth as well as other health problems, but it can also mean we cannot eat and chew properly and so our health is again affected. Infection in the mouth can affect the whole body and can be linked with heart disease, diabetes, stroke and respiratory disease. The most common conditions related to poor dental health are tooth decay and toothache, bleeding gums, mouth ulcers, bad breath, dental erosion and having a dry mouth. Usually these problems can be easily prevented or treated.

<u>Disease</u>	<u>Causes/Effects</u>	<u>What can be done</u>
Tooth Decay	Caused by high sugary foods, medications containing sugar, inadequate exposure to fluoride, poor oral hygiene and plaque.	Can be prevented, with a less sugary diet, thorough daily brushing, daily flossing, drinking tap water and the use of fluoride toothpaste with a soft tooth brush, or electric toothbrush.
Gum Disease	Caused by plaque, genetics, stress, certain medications (e.g. anti-depressant, heart etc) clenching / grinding teeth, poor nutrition, diabetes and smoking. It causes bad breath, bleeding gums and loose teeth.	Can be prevented with regular dental visits, removing plaque, thorough daily brushing, daily flossing, cleaning dentures, eating less sugary food, drinking tap water and the use of fluoride toothpaste with soft toothbrush.
Mouth Ulcers	Caused by badly fitting dentures, stress, ill health and trauma to the area. Identifiable through chronic inflammation.	Maintaining oral hygiene, eating healthy diet, good intake of Vitamin B, C and Zinc, and reducing stress. Any mouth ulcer lasting more than 14 days should be examined by a dentist as they have the potential to become malignant.
Bad Breath (Halitosis)	Caused by gum disease, dental decay, having a dry mouth, gastric problems, poorly cleaned	Maintaining oral and dental hygiene, cleaning tongue (specially back of the tongue), drinking plenty

	teeth, excessive bacterial activity on tongue, sinusitis or some other diseases (bronchitis etc).	of fluids, cleaning mouth after having milk products, chewing sugar-free gum and eating fresh fruit and vegetables.
Dental Erosion	Caused by the prolonged consumption of acidic foods and beverages, sugary drinks and medicines, and recurrent vomiting or reflux. Teeth become sensitive and painful, looking shorter and yellow in patches in addition to chipping away.	Use a straw for sugary or acidic drinks, cutting fruit into small pieces, sugar free medicines, restricting sugary foods to one meal per day, drinking tap water between meals, chewing sugar free gum, snacking on dairy foods, soft brushing with a fluoride toothpaste and regular dental visits.
Dry Mouth	A side effect of some medicines, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, smoking, nerve damage and diseases such as diabetes. Results in difficulty speaking and swallowing, interrupted sleep, sore throat/mouth and bad breath.	Preventable by reviewing medications, using 'dry mouth' products (e.g. biotene), controlling diabetes, drinking more water and a reduction of caffeine and smoking.

Some Tips for Dental Care

Tooth Brushing

- Brush your teeth at least twice a day (brushing is recommended after breakfast and at night just before going to bed).
- Lift the lip away from teeth.
- Use a soft toothbrush, an electric toothbrush is a good aid.
- Only use a 'pea sized' amount of fluoride toothpaste.
- Brush gums and teeth.
- Rinse brush regularly, replace every 3 months.
- Air dry toothbrush (so it doesn't grow bacteria) and store uncovered.

Denture

- Plaque forms on dentures as well as teeth, causing bad breath, decay in remaining teeth and gum disease.
- Remove dentures after each meal and rinse, clean dentures and gums twice a day.
- Clean with a nail brush and soap, do not use normal toothpaste, it is too abrasive. Do not use boiling water or harsh household cleaners like bleach.
- Remove at night and store in a cup of tap water.
- Place a washer or water in the basin when you're cleaning them, so that if you drop them, they will not break.
- Report any cracks or chips to the dentist, all dentures should be checked regularly. Visit your dentist if your denture is not fitting properly.

- Ask your dentist to engrave your initials on your denture, thus avoiding confusion if lost in hospital.
- Take care in handling your dentures.

Dental Service

The free NSW Public Dental Services provide emergency care, routine care and denture services for people who hold a

- Pensioner Concession Card, Health Care Card or Commonwealth Seniors Card.
- All children under the age of 5 years.
- Full - time students between the ages of 5 and 18 years.

Waiting lists apply to most services.

Tips for Diabetes Patient Attending Dental Appointment

- Ask for a morning appointment.
- Check your blood glucose level.
- Take your insulin (if required) and eat normally before visiting the dentist.
- Take a source of glucose with you.
- Give the dentist your current medication list and dosages (show your Medicine Record Card), and your diabetes doctor's contact details.
- Postpone non-emergency dental procedures if your blood sugar is not under control.
- Always follow your dentist's instructions.
- Keep in mind that healing may take longer in people with diabetes.

Diet and Nutrition

Improving your health by eating fruit and vegetables also reduces your risk of disease. An unhealthy diet can lead to gum disease and tooth decay, so to protect your teeth it is very important that you eat nutritious foods. Foods with a lot of carbohydrates, sugars and starches increase the production of plaque acids that attack tooth enamel and cause decay. If you must eat foods high in sugar or starch, eat them during meals, not as snacks and avoid sticky foods.

Xylitol is a natural sweetener that can be used instead of sugar. It doesn't increase plaque production and may even help to kill bacteria that cause decay. Good nutrition also benefits dental health. The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend that adults eat at least 2 serves of fruit and 5 serves of vegetables everyday because they're high in vitamins, minerals and dietary fibre. Some legumes (peas, beans etc) also contain protein.

One serve vegetable equals (for example):

- 75g (or half a cup) of vegetables or legumes, or
- One medium potato, or
- One cup of salad vegetables.

One serve fruit equals (for example):

- 150g of fresh fruit, or
- 1 medium sized piece of fruit (like an apple), or
- 2 small pieces of fruit (like 2 apricots).

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- www.health.gov.au
- www.gofor2and5.com.au



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