

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. *Dental caries* (tooth decay) and *periodontal* (gum) disease, can mostly be avoided or cured if we get help early. The experts tell us that bad dental 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.

Disease	Causes/Effects	What can be done
Tooth Decay	Caused by <i>Plaque</i> (which is white, soft and removable with a toothbrush) and <i>Calculus</i> , or <i>Tartar</i> (which is hard, calcified and difficult to remove).	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	Causes bad breath, bleeding gums and loose teeth.	Can be prevented with regular dental visits, thorough daily brushing, daily flossing, drinking tap water and the use of fluoride toothpaste with a toothbrush.
Mouth Ulcers	Caused by badly fitting dentures, ill health and trauma to the area. Identifiable through chronic inflammation.	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, having a dry mouth, gastric problems, poorly cleaned teeth and gums, sinusitis.	Preventable through treatment of the causes, for example; dry mouth treatments such as 'Biotene' dry mouth products.
Dental Erosion	Is irreversible and caused by teeth being dissolved through the prolonged consumption of acidic foods and beverages, sugary drinks and medicines,	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

	and recurrent vomiting or reflux. Teeth become sensitive and painful, looking shorter and yellow in patches in addition to chipping away.	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, controlling diabetes, drinking more water and a reduction of caffeine and smoking.

Some Tips for Dental Care

Tooth Brushing

- Plan your tooth brushing sequence, see attached sheets.
- 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, see attached sheets.

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

Waitlists 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)

Acknowledgements:

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