



THE FACTS ABOUT...

REAL HEALTH,

OPIOIDS AND HEPATITIS C

What is Oral Health?

Oral health is about keeping your mouth, gums and teeth in good condition to prevent tooth decay and gum disease.

Sounds simple? Well for some people it is. People, who are able to eat well, clean their teeth regularly and access regular dental care are better able to maintain their oral health. But for others, there are contributing factors that make good oral health harder to maintain.

Drug Use

Many illicit and prescribed drugs impact on oral health.

Psychostimulant use can result in “bruxism” – this is the name given to grinding of your teeth in your sleep which can result in tooth decay, bad taste, and jaw clenching problems

Opioid (heroin or methadone) users are prone to “xerostomia” which means dry mouth. Xerostomia significantly increases the risk of tooth decay, enamel erosion, and periodontal disease (gum disease).

Neglecting personal oral hygiene and a high intake of sugars and refined carbohydrates (sugary cereals, and items made from white flour) both contribute to poorer oral health.

Hepatitis C

Evidence suggests that people with hepatitis C are prone to tooth decay and have difficulty with food and diet.

Recent studies have shown an increased incidence of dry mouth



Dental and oral health has been and continues to be a major issue for: people who inject illicit drugs, people involved in treatment or maintenance programs and who are living with hepatitis C.

Barriers to accessing dental services include long waiting lists for free services and the possibility of discrimination because of your hepatitis C status.

This fact sheet will to assist you to understand what you can do for yourself in relation to your oral health and provide you with information to help you access required services...

in people living with hepatitis C. For people with cirrhosis, the most significant dental problem is prolonged bleeding following dental procedures caused by a lack of coagulation factors and thrombocytopenia (a low level of platelets in the blood so blood does not clot properly).

Drugs (interferon and ribavirin) used to treat hepatitis

- C may lower resistance to infection. A risk for a person with severe cirrhosis is that other drug interactions and toxicity will overburden an already stressed liver.

- It is best to defer non-urgent invasive dental treatment until hepatitis C treatment has ceased

A major issue for people who use opioids and are living with hepatitis C

- Xerostomia is the reduced ability to produce saliva in the mouth.
- This is one of the main contributors to poor dental health for opioid users living with hepatitis C.

- A dry mouth can increase the rate of breakdown of old fillings and promote tooth decay.

- Without saliva to wash away food debris, tooth decay develops around the edges of teeth and may lead to abscess formation and teeth extraction.

- If you have a dry mouth you should see your dentist regularly. (This is easier said than done! Call your state/territory drug user organisation for details of understanding dentists in your area).

Fast Facts!

Toothbrush

Many people think that a soft tooth brush does not do as good a job as a medium or hard toothbrush but this is not the case. Soft small-head toothbrushes such as the Oral-B 30 or 35, Colgate Diamond Head or Sensodyne Search, have been recommended for sensitive mouths. The Biotene Supersoft toothbrush has a large head, but the bristle filaments are finer and softer which is good for sensitive mouths. If you are using an electric toothbrush - the Braun 'Oral-B Plaque Remover' is easy to use. Remember to always change your toothbrush when it becomes worn.

Brushing

Brush your teeth thoroughly, at least twice a day using small circular strokes focusing on one tooth at a time. Avoid vigorous and horizontal brushing at the gum line of your teeth as this may damage the gum and cause root surfaces to be exposed.

Tooth root surfaces are extremely vulnerable to accelerated dental decay. Additional brushing is strongly recommended for anyone with reduced salivary flow.

Keep a spare toothbrush in your bag or pocket. Brushing for thirty seconds or more 4-5 times a day will limit the build up of plaque and food acids around tooth root margins and reduce the potential for accelerated dental decay.

The following sections suggest products that dentist recommend. Remember that these are suggestions only and that shop brands may do just as well.

Toothpaste

Most toothpastes contain the foaming agent sodium lauryl sulphate, or SLS, which has been found to cause irritation in sensitive mouths. Toothpastes containing SLS should be avoided if you have sore mouth (mucositis), oral ulcers or dry mouth. Biotene 'Dry Mouth Toothpaste' is SLS free and contains fluoride and important salivary enzymes. Rembrandt 'Natural' is also SLS free.

Mouthwash

If your mouth is sore due to mild irritation, rinsing with warm salt water or sodium bicarbonate may improve oral comfort. This is a cheap and effective alternative to mouthwash and is antibacterial. It is important to only use an anti-bacterial mouthwash, which DOES NOT contain alcohol or phenol if there are symptoms of dry mouth or sore mouth as alcohol has a drying effect on oral tissues.

Colgate Perioguard is an antiseptic and disinfectant mouthwash but may cause superficial staining of teeth.

Be aware that most other chlorhexidine containing mouthwashes contain alcohol. Biotene mouthwash is anti-bacterial, alcohol-free and like the 'Dry Mouth Toothpaste' contains salivary enzymes.

Flossing

Use dental floss or dental tape at least once daily. When you are flossing don't press down on the gums, especially if they are sensitive or bleed easily, as this can cut the gums. Instead, carefully ease the floss between the teeth with a back and forward motion. Make sure you gently clean under the gum line at the base of the tooth. Rub floss against the side of the tooth rather than down into the gum, and then pull the floss upwards along the side of the tooth.

Remember flossing does not just get food out from in between the teeth; it also gets out all that plaque that you can't reach with your toothbrush. Flossing can be a difficult habit to get in to if you are not used to it. Try flossing after you brush and you will see just how much brushing alone can miss – its worth the extra 1-2 mins!

Denture Care

Dentures are made from an acrylic resin which has microscopic holes or pores. It is essential that dentures are cleaned thoroughly every day with a toothbrush or denture brush.

Dentures should never be worn overnight and should be left soaking in warm water or a denture cleaner such as Steradent, when not being worn. Mouthwash should not be used while wearing dentures and dentures should not be left to soak in mouthwash as this might cause damage to them.

The gums and areas under a denture should also be brushed on a regular basis and the mouth rinsed after all meals. Brushing stimulates the gums and helps keep them firm and less likely to harbour the microorganisms which may lead to irritation or infection. Removing food debris limits irritation, staining and bad breath.

Oralbalance moisturising gel can be used on the tissue fitting surface of the denture to minimise irritation and may also improve retention.

At the first sign of discomfort, the denture should be removed and checked by a dentist as adjustment or relining may be required.

Topical Fluoride

Fluoride is used to prevent tooth decay. It strengthens tooth enamel that has been weakened by plaque acids. It also stops bacteria making plaque acid and slows bacteria reproduction.

1. Systemic fluoride is fluoride that is ingested (swallowed). This fluoride is absorbed into the developing teeth. This type of fluoride is important for children.

2. Topical fluoride is fluoride that washes over, and is absorbed into the weak surfaces of the teeth that have been created by plaque acids.

Fluoride can be added to water and some processed foods and drinks. Topical fluoride is available in many forms. Fluoride toothpaste is the most widely used and cheapest form. Topical fluoride gels, mouth rinses, fluoride tablets and drops are available commercially but professional advice should be obtained before using these products.

Saliva substitutes

Saliva substitutes may help keep your mouth moist and allow for easier eating, swallowing, talking and sleeping. Many patients have reported significant relief from the effects of dryness by using Oralbalance moisturising gel. It is also suitable to place under dentures. Dentacal is a mouth moistening liquid, which contains similar milk proteins to Tooth Mousse.

Nasal Hygiene

If you have a dry mouth you may also have a dry nose. Use salt water preparations designed for the nose like Sterimar 'Sea Water Microspray' to help moisturise the nasal passages.

Maintenance

Try to see a dentist three times a year for cleaning and early treatment of cavities.

A decrease in saliva means there is likely to be an increase in the amount of tooth decay.

Diet

Small regular meals and snacks may help you obtain adequate nutrients and prevent weight loss if you have problems chewing.

Carry a toothbrush with you. Always brush immediately after eating. If it is not possible to brush, swish and swallow with water as soon as possible. Chewing sugar free gum or sugar free lollies can also help as it stimulates saliva and reduces acidity in the mouth.

You can reduce tooth decay by limiting the amount of sweet, sticky, sugary foods or fizzy drinks and by rinsing your mouth after eating anything with a high acid level such as grapefruit, tomatoes or oranges.

Suggestions to relieve dryness and preserve soft tissue

- Take frequent sips of water.
- Use a water spray bottle to wet your mouth.
- Chewing sugarless chewing gum helps stimulate salivary flow. Recaldent is a chewing gum with the same active ingredient as Tooth Mousse ; however, it has the added benefit of reversing the early signs of tooth decay
- Suck sugar free lollies or sugar free hard candies.
- Suck (don't bite) on ice blocks.
- Keep a glass or bottle of water by your bed for sipping during the night or on awakening.
- Drink frequently while eating. This will make chewing and swallowing easier and may improve taste.
- Use bland, non-spicy sauces and gravies as accompaniments to meat dishes. Please put a reason why this is true.
- Moisten foods with butter.
- Pasta dishes with creamy sauces may be easier to swallow.
- Limit caffeine-containing coffee and tea. Many people report increased dryness after drinking beverages containing caffeine.

Where to buy the products

Electric toothbrushes may be purchased at leading department stores or through some dentists and pharmacists.

Most other products are available from chemists, although they may have to be ordered.

Many dentists now stock a wide range of dry mouth products for their patients.

Peer Support

Making an appointment to see the Dentist and actually making it to the appointment can be a challenge particularly if you have not been for a while, and you are embarrassed by your smile. If you feel like this then call your state/territory drug user organisation, they may be able to support you to get to the dentist. Remember everyone has the right to smile including you!



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