

Oral and Dental Health



Introduction

Keeping a healthy mouth is more than just about your teeth. Your mouth is the gateway to your body and is an important part of your general health and well-being. Good oral health helps to protect your body by reducing the risk of some infections and diseases.

A healthy mouth is important

Dental problems can cause pain, tooth sensitivity, bad breath and discomfort when eating and sleeping.

The main dental diseases which affect the mouth are tooth decay, gum disease and oral cancer. Other conditions common amongst young people includes tooth wear like erosion, mouth ulcers, sensitivity, dry mouth and bad breath.

Many of these conditions are preventable. By keeping up good oral hygiene and a healthy diet most dental diseases can be avoided or managed.

You might want to see a dentist if it has been more than one year since your last visit or if you have any of the following:

- Pain in your teeth, jaw or mouth that makes you uncomfortable.
- Infection (e.g. pain when you bite, red and/or bleeding gums when brushing).
- Swelling in your mouth, face and/or neck.
- If you have an injury to your mouth, teeth or face (e.g. at sporting match, accident and/or violence).
- Broken teeth.
- Bleeding gums.
- Loose or missing teeth.
- A constant dry mouth.

How do you find a dentist? - Public Dental Services

All young people and full time students under 18 years of age can receive free general dental care through [NSW Public Dental Services](#).

If you are under 17 years old you may also be eligible for some basic free dental care through the [Child Dental Benefits Schedule](#) (CDBS). Dental care using CDBS can be used through public dental services or the private dental sector.

If you are over 18 years and have a Health Care Card you are also eligible to receive free public dental care. For more information on the Health Care Card, see the [Medicare](#) page.

There can sometimes be a longer wait time for public health care services. Be honest with the public dental service about how much pain you are in so they can treat you accordingly.

The dental service will ask you for your Medicare card and/or Health Care Card numbers when you call to make an appointment, so try to have it with you when

you call.

Private Dentist

A private dentist can cost more money if you don't have [private health insurance](#). If you are under 18, you might be eligible for some support through the [CDBS](#) scheme. When you book your appointment, ask the dentist if you would be able to be treated under the CDBS scheme.

If you are over 18, studying full time, and your parents have private health insurance, you might be able to still receive private dental care through their insurance. If you're not sure, ask your parents who their private health insurance provider is and give the company a call.

If you have your own private health insurance, be sure to ask the company you are with what's included under dental care.

If you book an appointment with a private dentist, let them know which private health insurance company you are with so they can tell you if they accept it.

If your insurance company doesn't cover the cost of the medical expenses, then you will need to cover the 'gap' between what they cover and what the dentist charges.

For more information on private health insurance, visit the [Australian Dental Association](#) website.

Aboriginal Dental Clinics

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service's deliver holistic and culturally appropriate health and dental services to the community. For more information and to search for a service, visit the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW website or visit the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander page.

Dalarinji Oral Health Clinic is a Sydney based service, but offers support state wide. They have some tips on what to expect for your first appointment on their page as well.

To attend one of these clinics you will need:

- a [Medicare](#) card
- A confirmation of Aboriginality or a referral letter from an Aboriginal Medical Service or Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service confirming your Aboriginality. Visit the ACCHS page to find your closest service.

What will happen at the dentist

Regardless of which kind of dental clinic you attend, you will first need a 'check-up' appointment with the dentist so they can see what might be happening.

The dentist may:

- Check your mouth & teeth for any problems.
- Take x-rays of your teeth if required.
- Do a scale and clean of your teeth.
- Discuss how your teeth are and arrange to fix any damaged teeth.
- Provide other dental treatment like fillings if required.
- Show you the correct way to brush and floss your teeth and the right toothpaste to use.
- Talk about how to manage any conditions and prevent any dental problems in the future.

At the end they will let you know what to do next. If you need further dental work they should clearly explain what the treatment options are and why you need them. Be sure to ask what it's for and how much it would cost. Ask if there are cheaper treatment options if it's too expensive for you to manage.

If you don't feel that you fully understand what the treatment is or why you need it, ask the dentist to explain in a clearer way. If you feel like they are still unable to explaining it to you clearly enough you can request to see another dentist but you might need to pay for another appointment.

It's important to know and understand what's happening with your oral treatments. Some treatments can be life long adjustments to your teeth, like [root canals](#) and

[tooth extraction](#). You are in control of your health and knowing what treatments you have previously had, what your options are, and what you need done helps you to make the best choices for your situation.

Tips & Tricks: Keeping your mouth healthy

To keep your mouth healthy, follow some of these tips:

Brush your teeth, gums and tongue twice a day

- Brushing remove plaque/germs (bacteria).
- Use a soft toothbrush with a pea size amount of fluoride toothpaste.
- Spit out after brushing. Do not rinse with water, because a small amount of fluoride toothpaste left around the teeth will help strengthen them.
- Clean between your teeth every day with dental floss or interdental brushes. This will remove plaque and food between the teeth where the toothbrush bristles cannot reach.
- Electric or battery-operated toothbrushes can be useful as they have a small head and soft bristles.
- Replace your toothbrush every 3 months or earlier if bristles start to become shaggy.

Eat healthy food every day

- Eat more fruit and vegetables.
- Eat healthy snacks that protect your teeth, like cheese and plain yogurt.
- Limit foods high in added sugars, fats and salt especially between meals.

Drink water every day

- Especially fluoridated tap water. It is free and protects your teeth from dental decay.
- Drinking water keeps you hydrated and helps to prevent your mouth from becoming dry.
- Avoid drinks that contain added sugars (e.g. soft drinks, cordials, juice, sports drinks or energy drinks) as these can lead to tooth decay. For more

information see [Protecting Teen Teeth](#).

Avoid smoking

- Smoking causes poor oral health and can increase the risk of gum disease and oral cancer, as well as stained teeth and bad breath.
- For more information see [Protecting Teen Teeth](#), and the [Smoking](#) topic.
- If you are thinking of quitting, visit [iCanQuit](#) or call NSW Quitline [13 78 48](#) for advice and support.

Avoid drugs and excessive alcohol

- Alcohol, prescription and recreational drugs can cause dry mouth, bleeding gums, teeth grinding, tooth loss, staining of teeth, bad breath and can lead to dental decay, gum disease and cancer.
- For more information, visit the [Alcohol](#) and [Other Drugs](#) topic.

Dental Injuries

- Accidents can cause dental injuries to the teeth, lips, gums, tongue and face. They can cause the teeth to move, crack, chip or be lost.
- A large number of dental injuries occur during contact sport. Wearing a mouthguard when training or playing contact sports can minimise injuries to teeth, the jaw and surrounding tissue.
- If an adult tooth has been knocked out – remain calm and try to find the tooth. If found try to store it in milk/saline and see a dentist straight away (they might be able to put it back in).
- If an injury occurs seek advice from a dental practitioner or go straight to the [emergency department](#) of your local public Hospital.

Mouth piercings dental injuries

- Piercings can chip or crack teeth and cause an infection and ulceration to the tongue and cheek.
- They can also interfere with chewing and speaking.

- They can cause loss of taste and gum sensitivity.
- Always use plastic or rubber jewellery to protect teeth and have the piecing done by a professional.

Bulimia or anorexia

- Throwing up can cause damage to your teeth and gums. The stomach acid can cause tooth erosion and decay.
- If you throw up, you can minimise the damage to your teeth by rinsing your mouth out with water and rubbing toothpaste on your teeth with your finger- don't brush, it rubs the enamel away faster.
- See a dentist for more support about how to reduce the damage to your teeth. For more information see [Protecting Teen Teeth](#).

Oral & Dental Health resources

- [Protecting Teen Teeth: A digital media resource for teens to help improve their oral health](#)
- [Rethink sugary drinks: know how much sugar is in your drink](#)
- [Your Room: A place to get facts about alcohol and other drugs](#)
- [Healthy Eating Active Living: A guide for healthy eating tips](#)
- [Get Healthier for your Mob: Information on a free phone health coaching service](#)
- [NSW Public Dental Service: Check if you are eligible for free dental care](#)
- [iCanQuit: Provides advice and support to help you quit smoking](#)
- [Australian Dental Association Information: Oral health for 18- 30 years olds](#)
- [Multicultural Health Communication Service: Provides multicultural health resources](#)