

Health & Wellbeing

July – Dental health



Oral health statistics

Tempting as it is to think that everyone is practising good teeth and mouth hygiene, the reality is that the oral health of many Australians is not where it should be.

- 75% adults rarely or never floss or clean between their teeth.
- 1 in 5 adults brush only once per day.
- 39% of parents report their children drink 2 - 5 soft drinks per week.
- 2 in 3 adults usually visit the dentist for a problem rather than a regular check-up.
- 47% of adults (18+ years) consume too much sugar.

Brushing

If you are like most people, you probably don't give much thought to how you brush your teeth, beyond squirting on some toothpaste and brushing back and forth. But your brushing technique matters. How often you brush, how long you brush for - your brushing technique and the toothbrush you choose can all influence the effectiveness of your brushing.



Following a routine is a great way to remain consistent when brushing to ensure all surfaces are cleaned. Here's a step-by-step guide:

1. Consider starting at the back of your mouth with the toothbrush bristles placed at the gum line where the teeth meet the gums.

2. Hold the brush on a 45° angle, brushing gently in a back-forth motion. If you apply too much pressure when brushing, this can cause your gums to recede, as well as damaging the white tooth enamel.
3. You should take care to gently brush the outside, inside and chewing surfaces of your teeth, making sure you reach the inside surfaces of the front teeth, which are often missed.
4. Once you've finished brushing, spit out the excess toothpaste but do not rinse out your mouth with water. By not rinsing, this leaves a thin layer of toothpaste on the surface of your teeth helping to protect them for longer.

Look to do this twice per day, in the morning and again at night before bed. It's a simple routine that's easy to perform and should only take two minutes.

And don't forget your tongue. While it may seem strange at first to brush your tongue, a lot of bacteria live on its surface. Brushing the tongue can reduce the bacteria present, which can help with bad breath, officially known as halitosis or oral malodour. You should use the toothbrush bristles to gently scrape in a forward motion along the surface of the tongue.



Finding the right toothbrush for you

There is a large range of toothbrushes available on supermarket or chemist shelves to suit your oral health needs. But which one is right for you? In general, look to use a toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles. If you like your dental products to be recyclable, bamboo toothbrush handles can be recycled by separating them from head of the brush.

Should you have trouble using a manual toothbrush, you might consider using an electric toothbrush or a three-sided toothbrush. Some electric toothbrushes come with an in-built two-minute timer, which makes sticking to the recommended brushing time of two minutes much easier.

Consider replacing your toothbrush every three months, when the bristles are worn or after you've been unwell. If you are not sure which type of brush will work for you or your family, your dentist can help you.

Flossing

To care for the health of both your teeth and gums, it is recommended that as well as brushing, you should clean between your teeth at least once a day. This can be done with floss or interdental brushes.

No matter how well you brush your teeth, the bristles will not reach the surfaces between the teeth to remove bacteria, plaque or leftover food. That is where flossing and interdental brushes come in.

When to start flossing? It is recommended that once a child has two or more teeth touching side-by-side, parents should start flossing their children's teeth. This is often around the age of 2.

Visiting the dentist

Prevention is better than cure. It's best to visit your dentist regularly to protect your teeth and stay on top of issues as they arise rather than treat the diseases once they have advanced. So aim to see your dentist at least every 12 months.

Alternatively, your dentist will advise you how often you should return. Their recommendation is based on the health of your mouth and factors that may increase your risk of developing dental diseases, such as certain medical conditions and how well you care for your teeth at home.

