



## A quick guide to a healthy mouth in adults

This factsheet provides a summary of the simple steps that adults can take every day to protect and improve their oral health. The evidence based advice is from [Delivering better oral health](#)

### Looking after your mouth

- brush your teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste containing 1350 – 1500 parts per million fluoride (ppm) fluoride. Brush last thing at night, so that the fluoride continues to protect the teeth while you sleep, and on at least on one other occasion
- your dentist may prescribe toothpaste with a higher fluoride level if you are at particular risk of tooth decay
- brush all surfaces of each tooth carefully and the gum line
- spit out after brushing but do not rinse away the toothpaste as this reduces the effectiveness of the fluoride – spit don't rinse
- choose a toothbrush with a small head and medium-textured bristles, you can use either a manual or electric toothbrush
- if you need support to brush your teeth, toothbrush adaptations are available
- replace your toothbrush regularly, every one to three months or when the bristles are worn
- reduce the amount and number of times you have foods and drinks that contain added sugars
- reduce the amount of sugar-sweetened drinks you consume, such as fizzy and soft drinks and squash
- avoid sugary foods and drinks just before bedtime as the saliva flow in the mouth slows down when you sleep, and can increase the risk of tooth decay

## In addition

- as part of a daily oral health routine in addition to brushing, it is important to clean between the teeth using interdental brushes. Some people may not have large enough spaces in between their teeth to use an interdental brush so flossing can be a useful alternative
- the dental team will show you how best to clean between your teeth

## Looking after your gums

The following risk factors may increase the possibility of developing gum disease or complicate its treatment:

- smoking this increases the risk of gum disease and affects the response to treatment. It can increase the chance of losing your teeth. If you would like help to stop smoking, ask your dental team, they can refer you to the local stop smoking service
- if you have diabetes and have poor sugar control this increases your risk of gum disease, and makes treatment less effective
- some medications can affect gum health and can cause dry mouth or enlarged gums. Always let your dentist know if you are on medication

## Mouth cancer: how to reduce your risk

The main risk factors for mouth cancer are tobacco and alcohol:

- the combined effect of drinking alcohol and using tobacco multiplies your risk of developing mouth cancer
- do not smoke, or use smokeless tobacco (such as paan, chewing tobacco and gutkha). If you would like help to stop ask your dentist to refer you to the local stop smoking service
- the Chief Medical Officer for England has recommended that you are safest not to drink regularly more than 14 units per week, to keep health risks from drinking alcohol to a low level
- increase your intake of non-starchy vegetables and fruit

## Looking after dental implants

The soft tissue (gums) and bone around dental implants are at the same risk of inflammation and gum disease as those around natural teeth. If you have implants you should look after them just like natural teeth:

- clean between and around implants carefully using cleaning aids and toothbrushes as advised by the dental team
- attend the dentist regularly, as advised for checks of the health of gum and bone around implants

## Visiting the dentist

- you should see a dentist regularly for check-ups even if you have no teeth, or are free from any apparent problems with your mouth or teeth, as this helps you and your dentist to keep your mouth, teeth and gums in good health. Your dentist will advise you how often you need a check-up
- NHS dental treatment is free for children under 18 or under 19 and in qualifying full-time education
- women are entitled to free NHS dental treatment during pregnancy and any treatment commenced before their child's first birthday
- NHS Choices provides information on who is entitled to free dental care

## Find out more

For lifestyle tips for healthy teeth, visit NHS Choices:

[www.nhs.uk/Livewell/dentalhealth/Pages/Kepteethhealthy.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/dentalhealth/Pages/Kepteethhealthy.aspx)

The Eatwell Guide shows the proportions of different types of foods which are needed to have a well-balanced and healthy diet:

[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/510366/UPDATED\\_Eatwell-23MAR2016\\_England.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/510366/UPDATED_Eatwell-23MAR2016_England.pdf)

To find an NHS dentist visit:

[www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/dentists/Pages/find-an-NHS-dentist.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/dentists/Pages/find-an-NHS-dentist.aspx)

For information on who is entitled to free dental care or help with dental costs:

[www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/Dentalcosts.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/Dentalcosts.aspx)

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