



## Topic

# Best Practice Oral Health

### What is Oral Health?

Oral Health is the absence of active disease in the mouth and is essential to general health and quality of life. Optimum Oral Health, which is an expectation of all Australians, enables people to bite, chew, smile, speak and participate in their chosen roles without discomfort or embarrassment. <sup>1,2</sup>

### Impacts of poor Oral Health

Poor Oral Health can cause substantial infection and tooth loss. Common oral diseases often “result in severe pain and make everyday activities such as eating and speaking difficult”<sup>3</sup> and can disrupt sleep and productivity. “Tooth loss is directly associated with deteriorating diet and compromised nutrition, which can impair general health and exacerbate existing health conditions. Further, the mouth is often an entry point for infections, which may spread to other parts of the body.”<sup>4</sup> Poor Oral Health can limit an individual’s social interaction and impact negatively on psychological wellbeing. Oral diseases affect not only the mouth, but have been associated with cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, stroke and pre-term low birthweight. <sup>3</sup>

### Examples of oral diseases

The two most common oral diseases are dental caries (tooth decay) and periodontal disease (gum disease).

#### Dental caries (tooth decay)

Tooth decay is the cavitation of the layers of tooth structure caused by acid producing bacteria. Naturally, a film of bacteria known as plaque builds up on the surfaces of teeth; the bacteria found within plaque secrete the acid which breaks down tooth structure after the frequent ingestion of fermentable carbohydrates.<sup>5</sup> In its early stages, tooth decay can be completely reversed; however, if left untreated the inner layers of the tooth become destroyed, causing irreversible damage and needing restorative treatment, or the extraction of the tooth in some cases. <sup>3</sup>

#### Periodontal disease (gum disease)

Gum disease describes a range of conditions that affect the supporting tissues for the teeth, which include the gums, the deeper tissues and the bone, the root surfaces of teeth and the ligament that connects the teeth to the bone. When the same film of bacteria mentioned before - plaque - is not removed, plaque can harden and form “tartar” or “calculus” that brushing doesn’t clean. Only a professional cleaning by a dentist or dental hygienist can remove tartar or calculus. The mild form of gum disease is “gingivitis”, this is when the bacteria cause inflammation of the gums which become red and swollen and can bleed easily. Gingivitis can usually be reversed as it does not include any loss of bone and tissue that hold teeth in place. “When gingivitis is not treated, it can advance to “periodontitis” (which means “inflammation around the tooth”). In periodontitis, gums pull away from the teeth and form spaces (called “pockets”) that become infected. The body’s immune system fights the bacteria and...the body’s natural response to infection start to break down the bone and connective tissue that hold teeth in place. If not treated, the bones, gums, and tissue that support the teeth are destroyed. The teeth may eventually become loose and have to be removed.” <sup>6</sup>

Other oral diseases include oral cancer, oral infectious diseases and trauma from injuries.

# NSW Messages for a healthy mouth - Strategies for all to maintain optimum Oral Health

## Eat Well

- Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods
- Avoid snacking on sugary and sticky foods between meals

## Drink Well

- Tap water is the best drink
- Avoid drinking acidic and sugary drinks between meals

## Children

- Breastfeeding is recommended until at least 6 months of age
- Always hold your baby when bottle feeding and take the bottle away when they've had enough
- Putting a baby to bed with a bottle can cause tooth decay
- Encourage your baby to drink from a cup at 6-8 months

## Clean well

- Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, especially before bed
- Brush teeth and gums with a toothbrush that has soft bristles and a small head
- Clean between teeth every day with floss or an interdental brush
- Clean dentures properly every day

### Children - Parents should:

- Brush their children's teeth from when they first appear to 17 months **without toothpaste**
- Brush their children's teeth from 18 months to 5 years **with a pea-sized smear of low fluoride toothpaste**
- Brush their children's teeth from 6 years **with a pea-sized smear of standard fluoride toothpaste**
- Assist their child brushing at least once a day until they are 8 or 9 years old

## Play well

- Wear a professionally fitted mouthguard when playing and training for any sport where there is a risk for mouth injury
- If an injury to the mouth occurs, seek professional advice immediately

## Stay well

- Children should have their first dental visit by their 1st birthday
- Have regular check-ups at the dentist
- Dental check-ups are especially important during pregnancy
- Don't smoke
- Limit alcohol
- Protect your face especially lips from excessive sun exposure. <sup>7</sup>

## References

- <sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation. (2012, April). Oral Health. Retrieved February 23, 2015, from World Health Organisation: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs318/en/>
- <sup>2</sup> Australian Dental Association. (2015). Australian Dental Association. Retrieved February 23, 2015, from Oral Health: <http://ada.org.au/oralhealth/default.aspx>
- <sup>3</sup> Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet. (2011). Review of Indigenous oral health. Retrieved February 23, 2015, from Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet: <http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/other-health-conditions/oral/reviews/our-review>
- <sup>4</sup> Commonwealth of Australia. (2012, September 03). Report of the National Advisory Council on Dental Health Outcomes and Impact of Oral Disease. Retrieved February 23, 2015, from The Department of Health: [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/report\\_nacdh~report\\_nacdh\\_ch1~report\\_nacdh\\_out](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/report_nacdh~report_nacdh_ch1~report_nacdh_out)
- <sup>5</sup> University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. (1996). Microbiology of Dental Decay and Periodontal Disease.
- <sup>6</sup> National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. (2014, December 08). Periodontal (Gum) Disease: Causes, Symptoms, and Treatments. Retrieved February 23, 2015, from National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research: <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/oralhealth/Topics/GumDiseases/PeriodontalGumDisease.htm>
- <sup>7</sup> NSW Department of Health. (2007). NSW Messages for a healthy mouth. Retrieved February 23, 2015, from <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/oralhealth/Publications/healthy-mouth-2007.pdf>