

About you: Dental health

This help sheet provides information about caring for your dental health. It discusses some possible causes of dental problems as well as practical advice for maintaining the best possible dental health.

Looking after your teeth, mouth and gums is important for your general health and wellbeing.

For people living with dementia, dental problems can arise for many reasons:

- Dementia can cause changes to memory and thinking, which can impact dental care routines.
- Taking medications and changes in brain function caused by dementia can slow the production of saliva. Saliva is essential to maintain a healthy mouth and prevent tooth decay, mouth ulcers and sores.
- Sugar-based medications taken long-term can lead to tooth decay, the condition 'dry mouth' and difficulties using dentures.
- Changes to eating habits, such as replacing main meals with snacks, sucking lollies or drinking sweetened tea.

Below are some tips to help you look after your dental health.

Care of natural teeth

Dental care

- Set yourself a daily reminder to clean your teeth with the steps of brushing, using dental floss and finally, using mouthwash. Consider either writing the steps down or using a picture chart and putting it up by the bathroom basin.
- If you need assistance, ask a family member or friend to help.
- Consider using mouth rinses and gels containing fluoride and antimicrobial agents to help reduce dental decay and gum disease. These are available from the chemist.
- Fluorides and antimicrobials should not be used within two hours of each other, so you could try using one in the morning and the other at night.

Sugar intake

- Consider the use of artificial sweeteners in drinks and snacks. But if you have diabetes, check this with your doctor.
- Try having sugar-free snacks.
- Drink water or soft drinks that are sugar-free or have reduced sugar.

Tooth decay

If you have tooth decay, or are at risk of developing decay, discuss and monitor this with your dentist.

Denture care

- Set yourself a daily reminder to clean and brush dentures.
- Book a professional denture clean with your dentist every six months.
- If wearing dentures becomes difficult, speak with your dentist. If you need help with putting your dentures in, ask a family member for help.

Dry mouth

If you frequently suffer from dry mouth:

- Try to drink plenty of water.
- Ask your dentist or doctor about medications and products that may help you.

Visits to the dentist

Six-monthly dental check-ups are important to look after your dental health.

- Book a thorough dental assessment in the early stages of your diagnosis. Provide details of your diagnosis, full medical history, and a current list of medications. This information will help the dentist create a dental health care plan.
- Consider inviting a family member or carer to your dental appointments.
- If you are eligible for public-funded dental care, contact your nearest dental hospital to enquire if they have staff who specialise in treating people with dementia.

Based on information provided by Associate Professor Jane Chalmers, a specialist in dementia dental health.

Additional reading and resources

- Dementia Australia help sheets
Visit: dementia.org.au/help-sheets
- Dementia Australia national library
Visit: dementia.org.au/library
- Dementia Australia support
Visit: dementia.org.au/support
- Dementia Australia education
Visit: dementia.org.au/education

Further information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling.

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500

For language assistance: 131 450

Visit our website: dementia.org.au