

# Maintaining good oral health



As you age, your oral health needs can change. This can be due to other health conditions you may have or the side effects of certain medications. Dental and general health are closely related, so it's important for you to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

A healthy mouth also means you can eat, speak, and smile without pain or embarrassment. An unhealthy mouth can be costly and lower the quality of your life.

## Four steps for oral health

1. **Clean your teeth twice a day** using a toothbrush and toothpaste containing fluoride.
2. **Clean between your teeth** every day using floss or an alternative. A dentist can provide advice on what will work best for your teeth.
3. **Eat a healthy balanced diet.** Avoid snacking and cut back on sugar. Sugar is the main cause of tooth decay.
4. **Visit a dentist for regular check-ups and support.** The ADA's [Find a Dentist website](#) can help you to find a dentist for your needs, including Public Health and community dentists.

# Healthy mouth, healthy body

Seeing a dentist means oral health issues can be found early. For example, tooth decay, gum disease and oral cancers may not cause pain until they're well advanced.

A healthy mouth can help you maintain a healthy body. Researchers are now finding connections with oral health and Type 2 Diabetes, heart diseases, gut issues, lung conditions, and Alzheimer's disease ([Diagnostics 2021](#)).

## How often should you see a dentist?

The answer to how often you should visit a dentist depends on your individual needs and risk factors. Some people may only need to visit the dentist once or twice a year, while others may need to go more often.

A dentist can create an individual treatment plan for you and advise how often to have a check-up. This will be based on your oral health history and if you are at risk of having dental problems. For example, if you have diabetes, heart disease, or other chronic conditions that can affect your oral health.

You should see a dentist for tooth damage, gum diseases, dry mouth, dentures and denture-related problems. However, there are other health conditions a dentist can help you to manage. For example:

- **diabetes** and **dementia**
- **sleep apnoea or snoring** and can be improved with an oral device that can help you breathe better at night. A dentist can help you to fit the device properly.
- **chronic headaches** caused by a condition like temporomandibular joint disorder (TMJ) which affects the jaw muscles and nerves. A dentist can fit appliances like splints for pain relief.

# How to reduce dental care costs

Healthdirect explains the [cost of dental care in Australia](#), including how to use Medicare and private health insurance.

They recommend:

- finding out if you really need the procedure by determining if the benefits outweigh the risks
- asking for a quote to find out how much the procedure costs
- costing item numbers so that you can call a few dentists to compare prices
- asking if there are less expensive alternatives. For example, can they use a less expensive type of filling?

## Lower-cost dental services for older people

The availability and cost of dental services depends on the state or territory you live in:

- Australian Capital Territory – [ACT Health](#)
- New South Wales – [NSW Health](#)
- Northern Territory – [Department of Health](#)
- Queensland – [Queensland Health](#)
- South Australia – [SA Dental](#)
- Tasmania – [Oral Health Tasmania](#)
- Victoria – [Department of Health](#)
- Western Australia – [Dental Health Services](#)

# DVA Health Cards

If you have a [Department of Veterans' Affairs DVA white or gold card](#), you are eligible for dental treatments. Check with your dental provider if they will accept DVA veterans' health cards.



## The Aged Care Dental Program

The [Australian Dental Foundation](#) is a not-for-profit organisation that supports people in aged care facilities and residential living complexes. It offers a mobile dental service that can provide a range of dental treatments at a minimal cost for residents.

## Dental tourism

[Dental tourism](#) may seem like a clever way to save money, but you first need to find out as much as you can to reduce the risks. For example:

- an increased risk of infections, particularly in tropical environments,
- not all countries have the same requirements for quality dental materials like those approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) in Australia,
- the risk of post-operative deep vein thrombosis on the long-haul flight home; and
- the extra cost if you need to go back for more dental work.

## More helpful information

If you need more information, get in touch with one of our helpful team on 1800 951 971.

If you'd like to learn more about maintaining good oral health, follow the links below:

- [Guide to dental procedures | healthdirect](#)
- Australian Dental Association (ADA) [Printable fact sheets](#) and [Oral health pro-tip videos](#)
- [How to get a deadly smile](#) by Jade Beetson, a dental assistant and a proud Ngemba women from Brewarrina, NSW.
- [Older Adults 65+ | ADA](#)
- [Smiling signs AUSLAN resources | ADA](#)
- [Dental tourism: Things to consider before going that extra mile for your smile - ABC News](#)

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