

WORD OF MOUTH

MAGAZINE



**Oral Health
Foundation**
Better oral health for all

ISSUE 89 | MARCH 2020 In this issue, we give an update on National Smile Month 2020, advice on maintaining good oral health and the top pledges you can take to gain a healthier smile.

Editor's Welcome

Hello and welcome to a brand-new issue of Word of Mouth – the Oral Health Foundation's digital magazine.

I would like to take this opportunity to first wish you and your family well. I hope you are healthy and keeping safe.

We are living in unprecedented times and there is no guide on how to get through it, but we, at the Oral Health Foundation is determined to do everything we can to help you get through this difficult period.

In this issue of Word of Mouth, we have plenty of information that will help you look after your oral health during this time and we provide an update on National Smile Month 2020.

Despite the ongoing pandemic, we believe we can continue to champion oral health in a way that is safe for all. Together we can still make a big difference.

You will also find information on spotting dental problems in those around you and the top five oral health pledges you can take to achieve a better smile.

Please enjoy this edition of Word of Mouth and thank you once again for your fantastic support.



David Arnold
Editor, Word of Mouth



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National Smile Month 2020: Why we are still going ahead

This is an open letter from Dr Nigel Carter, Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation

Over the last few weeks, the coronavirus pandemic has changed the way we live our lives. Our social interactions are limited, the working day is different, as is the family dynamic at home. The situation changes daily and speculation about relaxing isolation and social distancing seems all but a stab in the dark.

Of course, at present there is no alternative.

Coronavirus is the most devastating pandemic of the generation and could become the biggest global outbreak since Spanish Flu. Staying at home and limited social contact to people in your house is vital.

As a charity we have had to change how we work. Our staff are working from home, including our team on the Dental Helpline, who are receiving an unprecedented number of calls from people who are unable to access dental care at this time.

We also had another hard decision to make about National Smile Month. The campaign runs in between 18 May and 18 June and is our biggest annual event to engage people about the benefits of good oral health. While we cannot know what lays ahead, it is highly unlikely the country will return to any sort of normality by then.

Traditionally, National Smile Month is all about community. Whether it's championing oral health in schools, workplaces, high streets or shopping centres. National Smile Month has given us a chance to connect with some of the most in-need and vulnerable people in the UK.

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Dr Nigel Carter OBE,
Chief Executive of the
Oral Health Foundation



Our charity, volunteers and thousands of supporters will be delivering oral health messages on digital platforms. In 2020, National Smile Month will be an entirely digital charity campaign.

We're really proud to be running National Smile Month – especially at this time – where we believe a positive campaign, about the value of a smile, is needed now more than ever. At the heart of the campaign is positivity and spreading the word about the importance of a healthy smile – this will never change.

We can't do this alone. We need your help to spread these messages which means we still need you to be shouting about it on social media and getting involved in whatever way you can!

Keep your eyes peeled for our campaign website and social media for all the latest information about what events and activities we'll be running during the campaign as well as great ideas on what digital activities and events you can run.

Be sure to follow National Smile Month on social media - [@SmileMonth on Twitter](#) and [@NationalSmileMonth on Facebook](#).

Also make sure to follow the Oral Health Foundation if you haven't already by searching [@dentalhealthorg on Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) or simply ['Oral Health Foundation' on LinkedIn](#).

We look forward to what National Smile Month has to offer and even more so to as many people as possible getting involved. Arguably, the messages of National Smile Month are more important than ever as positivity and health become so paramount in times like these.

If you would like further information or have any questions then please contact our PR team by emailing pr@dentalhealth.org or by reaching out on our Facebook page.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for your patience and understanding, together we can give the nation the healthy smile it deserves.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Nigel Carter OBE



COVID-19: using better oral hygiene to looking after your household

Given the current situation that many of us across the world find ourselves in, keeping great personal hygiene has arguably never been more important.

Advice around how to do this is something that we all should take note of. Especially regular handwashing with soap for at least 20 seconds or using hand sanitiser gel when this is not possible.

One of the most important things to remember is that doing these things and being as hygienic as possible doesn't just help protect you, but it also protects those around you.

To help you achieve this, the Oral Health Foundation has provided the following advice to help you avoid catching or spreading the coronavirus (COVID-19).

Never share a toothbrush

No matter whether you are related or how close you are to the people you live with, you should never share your toothbrush with anybody else.

This is one way that viruses and blood-borne diseases can be caught from other people.

For the same reason, you should make sure that toothbrush heads are also kept apart from each other wherever you and the rest of your household store your toothbrushes.

Close the toilet lid before you flush

Where you keep your toothbrush is very important. If you store your brush anywhere near your toilet, every time someone flushes, some of the spray will fly out of the toilet and land on your toothbrush.



There has already been research conducted that suggests that the virus can be spread via faecal matter (poo).

So, make sure your brush is a safe distance away from your toilet, or better yet, make sure you close the lid before you flush.

Change your toothbrush regularly

It's important to change your toothbrush, or brush head, at least every three months. Perhaps even earlier if the bristles become frayed.

This helps to ensure you are brushing your teeth effectively. A worn brush can't do the job it needs to.

Changing your brush regularly also helps prevent the spread of bacteria. If you have had the coronavirus (or suspect that you may have), get a new toothbrush or brush head.

Visiting the dentist

Maintaining regular visits to your dental team will always be important. During this period of uncertainty, it's best to always check before any appointments that you have by phoning ahead.

Be prepared for your appointment to either be delayed or cancelled. This is for the safety of both staff and patients. Emergency treatment may still be available but other, more routine





procedures, may be postponed for the foreseeable future.

Clean your bathroom regularly

Our bathrooms are the place where many of us store our toothbrushes, towels, flannels and other intimate items.

It's also the place we go in order to get clean. So, for obvious reasons, it's important that the surfaces in your bathroom generally are cleaned regularly using a bleach-based cleaning product.

Don't forget to do the basics

Our oral health should always be a priority. In addition to visiting your local dental team when possible, don't forget the simple day-to-day habits that will help you keep a healthy mouth.

- Brush daily with a fluoride toothpaste last thing at night and at least one other time during the day.
- Drink plenty of water and cut down on how much and how often you have sugary foods and drinks.
- Clean between your teeth every day with interdental brushes or floss and consider using mouthwash.

For better oral health, hygiene and well-being it's important we all take these measures to protect ourselves and each other.

For more advice on the coronavirus, please head to the [official NHS website](#).

IS YOUR MOUTH ON YOUR MIND?

Your oral health matters to us.

Put your mind at ease and reach out to one of our dental advisors.

We're here to help.

 **Dental
Helpline**
01788 539780
Oral Health Foundation

Anything you want to know about your dental health, our experts are awaiting your call.

Our free and impartial advice centre is open between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. If you need urgent advice on any oral health issue please give us a call on 01788 539780 (local rate call in the UK), alternatively you can email helpline@dentalhealth.org



Our Dental Helpline is still here to answer your queries

As a result of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, many dental practices have now decided to close or only offer urgent or emergency dental treatment.

During this period, the Oral Health Foundation's Dental Helpline is here to answer any questions you have about your oral health.

NHS 111 is experiencing a high level of calls due to COVID-19.

If you have a query about your oral health, use our service and this will help to ease the strain on the NHS.


The [Dental Helpline](#) will continue to be an invaluable resource for those looking to seek advice, help and reassurance about their oral health and wellbeing. It is a truly charitable service. All enquiries are completely confidential and answered as quickly as possible.

Opening times are between 09:00 and 17:00, Monday to Friday.

Call our experts on 01788 539 780.

We are also available via e-mail at helpline@dentalhealth.org.

Don't forget, we also have a library of oral health information available by clicking [here](#).



New statistics on childhood tooth decay suggest lack of progress

Leading charity, the Oral Health Foundation, is calling for a united effort to take action against the ongoing issue of childhood tooth decay.

The concern for the oral health and general wellbeing of children has been prompted by the release of new statistics from Public Health England (PHE) that reveal around one-in-four (23%) of 5-year-olds in 2019 have had dental decay.

These findings are identical to the results of the previous survey in 2017 which suggests that no progress has been made towards tackling an unacceptable level of childhood tooth decay in England.

Speaking on the need to address these figures, Dr Nigel Carter OBE, Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation said: "In 2020 and the years to come, we





can make progress to tackle a heart-breaking level of childhood tooth decay and protect the future of the nation's oral health.

"No child should be born into a world where they have a one-in-four chance of having decayed teeth on their fifth birthday.

"Over the last decade, we have seen significant progress to reduce the rate of childhood tooth decay, however it is disappointing to see advances come to a halt in recent years and far too many children are suffering needlessly.

"Tooth decay is almost entirely preventable, yet it remains the number one reason for childhood hospital admissions for general anaesthesia in the UK.

"We can put an end to this by making positive dietary changes. Reducing how much and how often children have sugar while introducing healthier foods like fruits and vegetables can help them avoid tooth decay and obesity.

"Brushing twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste is also absolutely essential for people of all ages. It can aid dental health by making tooth enamel stronger and more resistant to tooth decay.

"Introducing water fluoridation schemes could dramatically improve the oral health of children across the nation, especially in the most deprived communities. Currently, less than 10% of the UK population are supplied with fluoridated water and this is not enough to bring about the change that we all want to see."

The survey conducted by PHE also revealed that children from more deprived areas (34%) are more than twice as likely to have dental decay compared to those from less deprived areas (14%).

"At the Oral Health Foundation, we strongly believe that prevention is better than a cure," continued Dr Carter.

"We can be part of the solution and help countless children avoid the unnecessary pain and distress caused by this problem.

"Throughout 2020 and beyond, we will continue to promote campaigns like National Smile Month that help foster healthier communities and reduce unacceptable inequalities in oral health.

"Through our range of educational resources, we will continue to give health providers, professionals and public bodies the tools their need to champion oral health across the UK, helping the most vulnerable and at-risk groups.

"These resources can play a vital role in supporting the oral health of children and educating them on how to achieve a healthy smile from an early age.

"You're never too young to learn about your oral health. Our Dental Buddy programme provides curriculum-based resources that can help engage children of all ages on the importance of a healthy mouth.

"We cannot do it without you. Your support is crucial to allow us to continue providing vital services, advice and guidance for many people across the UK.

"Together we will change lives across the country for the better by helping people of all ages achieve better oral health."

For more information on tooth decay and to support the Oral Health Foundation in their mission to bring better oral health to all, [click here](#).

If you are a dental professional who would like to help us deliver oral health education to schools in your local area please contact us by emailing mail@dentalhealth.org. Alternatively, if you would like to browse our range of educational resources, please head to www.dentalhealthshop.org.





Spotting dental problems in those you care for

Kiran Prashar | BDS (Hons)
MPhys (Hons) AKC MJDF

It can be a real challenge to look after the mouth of a loved one who can't quite manage on their own anymore. For many, the idea of getting in there to give it a good clean can be daunting; it is dark, difficult to see, and you're not entirely sure if what you're looking at is normal or not. The purpose of this article is to try to give you some pointers on what to look out for, when to call a dentist and what to expect when you do.

I am a dentist who works in special care - seeing patients who have increased needs - both in the clinic and where they live, be that in their house or in a care home.

One of the first things we have to assess when we see patients is whether they have the capacity to consent for treatment. In basic terms, this means can the person:

1. Understand the pros and cons of the treatment proposed
2. Remember that information long enough to make a decision
3. Express that decision - through whatever means

The other key consideration is whether they will cooperate with treatment. A good rule of thumb is that if someone will allow for their teeth to be brushed without too much issue, they will probably be able to sit





through at least simple dental treatment. Those who won't let anyone get near them with a toothbrush may only be able to be treated when they have been put to sleep with a general anaesthetic. This last group of patients can present a bit of a dilemma as general anaesthetic is not without its risks, especially for the elderly or people with complicated medical conditions.

In this article I am going to discuss some of the most common problems people have with their mouths. I will try to explain what to look for, how it might be treated and what considerations we may have to make for people who will not cooperate with treatment whilst they are awake.

Broken teeth

Teeth can break for a number of reasons. They can have decay, which, when advanced enough, will cause cavities (holes) to form. Over time these holes will grow and, if they get big enough, the whole top of the tooth can break off, leaving just the root sticking out of the gum.

Some people grind their teeth causing them to wear away or fracture. Fillings, despite what we in the dental world would like to believe, don't tend to last for ever. When they fall out, they can leave the tooth looking broken.

Finally, if someone falls over and hits their face, they may break a tooth from the impact.

Generally, it is a good idea to get a broken tooth checked out by a dentist. If the person can make it into a dental surgery and cooperate with treatment - then there is often a lot we can do for them. If they have to be seen at home we are more limited in what we can do. We can smooth off rough edges to stop them cutting the cheeks or tongue and we may be able to patch up holes, but if the tooth is decayed, we will most likely only be able to slow down the rate of decay, rather than stop it.

For people who cannot cooperate with any treatment awake, we have to ask - is this problem causing them pain? Is it making it difficult for them to eat? The answers to these questions can then be weighed up

against the risks of a general anaesthetic.

Loose teeth

Seeing a tooth wobble about when you touch it can be a bit of a shock, but it is more common than you might realise. Adult teeth can be wobbly (or mobile, as we dentists like to say) for a number of reasons.

Gum disease (also known as periodontitis) can cause the bone that holds teeth in place to be lost.

Over many years this will make teeth loose. Unfortunately, by the time the teeth are getting wobbly, much of the damage has already been done and the bone, once it has been lost, is unlikely to ever come back.

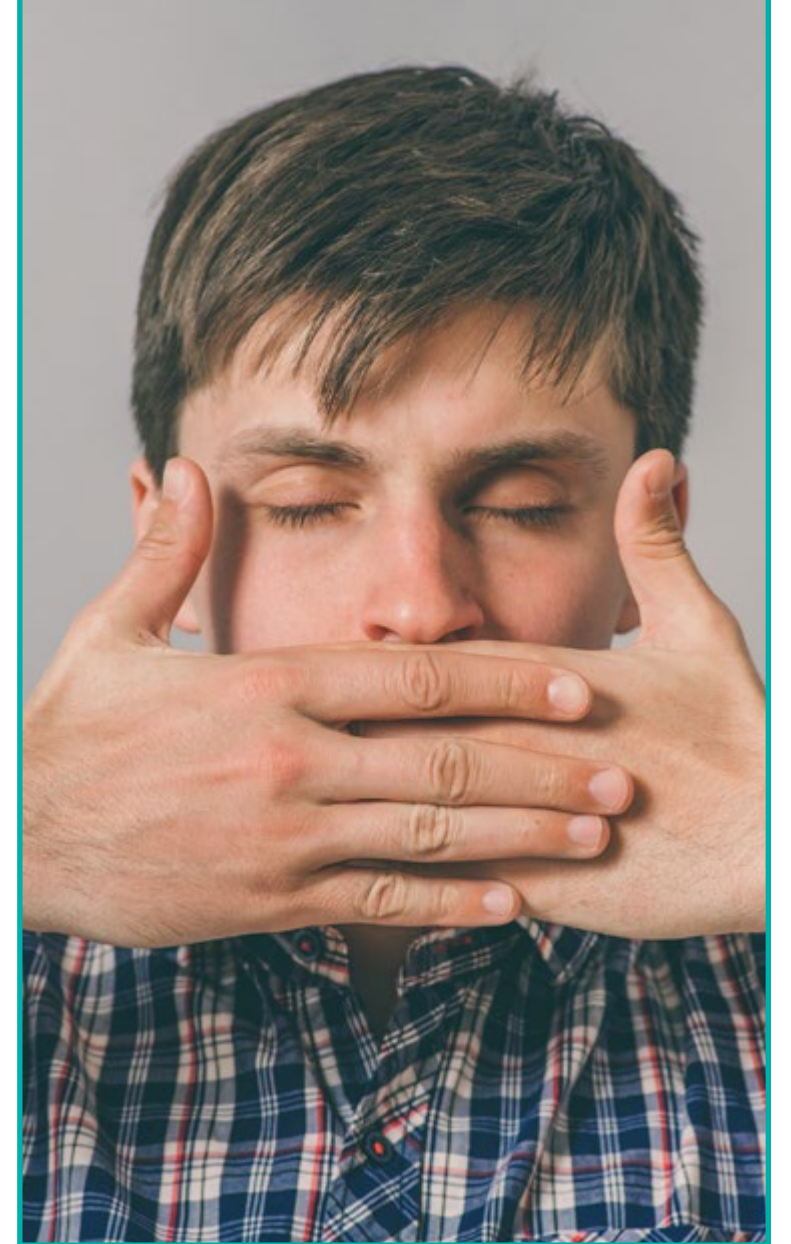
It may be possible, with treatment, to get the teeth to firm up a little bit - but this would require the person's teeth to be kept exquisitely clean, every day, for the rest of their lives. In some cases one has to ask whether this is a realistic prospect.

Overloading can be another reason why teeth become loose. An adult with a full set of teeth will have 14 or 16 teeth per jaw (depending on whether they have wisdom teeth) and the load placed on them when you bite together is spread across them all.

Now imagine someone who has lost many teeth and now only has 5 or 6 left. The remaining teeth still have to take all of that load. It should not come as a surprise that this can make them a little wobbly. The good news is that this may not be a problem, and, provided they are kept clean, those teeth may keep going like that for many years.

Finally, infection is another common cause for teeth becoming loose. Generally these teeth will be sore to touch and may have a swelling or boil in the gum. Perhaps there will be a little pus around the tooth. These definitely need to be seen by a dentist.

Important questions to bear in mind with regards to loose teeth are: Is the tooth causing any pain? Is this a recent problem or has the tooth been like this for a long time? Is it causing the person difficulties with eating? For very loose teeth, the only options may be to either leave the tooth as it is, or to remove it. Taking teeth out outside of a clinic is generally considered to be unsafe and so tends not to be routinely done in care homes.





Dentures

When I was training, my consultant always used to tell me: “Dentures are not a replacement for teeth. Dentures are an alternative to having no teeth”. This is important to bear in mind when you set your expectations for what is essentially a lump of plastic masquerading as teeth.

That being said, dentures can be wonderful - giving people back their smile and perhaps helping them chew food a little better.

Dentures, however, have a terrible habit of getting lost. One useful tip, if you’re ever having dentures made for a loved one, is to ask your dentist to have a little name label set into them. Another tip would be to never, and I mean never, wrap a denture in a tissue. You would not believe how many people I have seen who have had theirs accidentally thrown away because of that.

People will often complain that their dentures have become loose over time and have started to rub. This is generally because, over time, the shape of our mouths change - especially if we have lost teeth. In these cases, if the denture is otherwise fine, it may just need re-lining to make it fit a little more snug. This is a relatively simple procedure. If the teeth have worn or there are other problems with the denture, it may need replacing.

Many patients are referred to me because they have lost their denture. Often, this just means that a new set needs to be made, but it is worth asking a few questions first. How long has the patient been without their denture? Have they been coping well without it? Are they managing to eat well? Does the patient actually want a new set?

It is important to consider that as people get older or their mental faculties decline, their ability to cope with change decreases. If a 98 year old with advanced dementia is referred in for a new set of

dentures, despite the fact that she lost her old set 5 years ago, one has to be sure that subjecting her to the ordeal of coming into clinic 6 or so times to have a new set made is actually in her best interest.

Ulcers

Mouth ulcers can be caused by a wide variety of things and, whilst they are normally not too serious, they can be very painful. It is certainly worth arranging for a dental examination if they are affecting the person’s quality of life.

If a single ulcer lasts more than 3 weeks, you should definitely arrange for an urgent check to make sure it isn’t anything more serious.

Pain

I’m sure this goes without saying, but if your loved one is finding it more difficult to eat than usual and you suspect it is a mouth or tooth problem, please arrange for an urgent appointment. The same can be said if they are reporting or displaying signs of unusual distress or pain that appears to be coming from the mouth. Swollen faces warrant an urgent appointment.

So, that should cover all the most common problems you may encounter. I hope this article has been useful to you in identifying potential issues, as well as giving you an idea of what to expect if you have to seek treatment for the ones you care for.

Your guide to dental care and the coronavirus (COVID-19)

Here is all you need to know about how the coronavirus pandemic will impact your dental care.

It is likely that the coronavirus will have an effect on your dental care.

Routine dental check-ups may be cancelled, and ongoing treatment plans may be disrupted. Where and how you access emergency dental treatment could also change.

Make sure you visit www.dentalhealth.org/coronavirus for any updates.

This article will include the latest advice on how you can access dental care, treatment and advice during the coronavirus pandemic.

Visiting the dental practice

To help stop the spread of coronavirus, we are advising against all non-urgent dental treatment.

This includes:

- Dental check-ups.
- Preventive treatments such as scale and polish and fluoride varnishes.
- Examinations and x-rays.
- Appointments for braces.
- Cosmetic dental treatment of any kind e.g. tooth whitening.
- Routine denture treatment.
- Treatments on teeth that are not painful e.g. fillings and extractions.

It is likely that your dental practice will contact you to postpone these appointments if they have not already done so.

If you do not hear from your dental practice, we recommend that you contact them to cancel your appointment and rearrange it for a later date.

Some dental practices have decided to close during this time, while others are running reduced services. If you have been affected by this, your dental practice should have been in contact with you.

Whenever possible, stay at home and help stop the spread of coronavirus. This includes people of all ages – even if you do not have any symptoms or other health conditions.

Non-necessary dental treatment is not a reason for you to leave the home.

Urgent dental care

If you are in pain, bleeding, swelling, or have had an accident and need urgent dental care, please contact your dental practice.

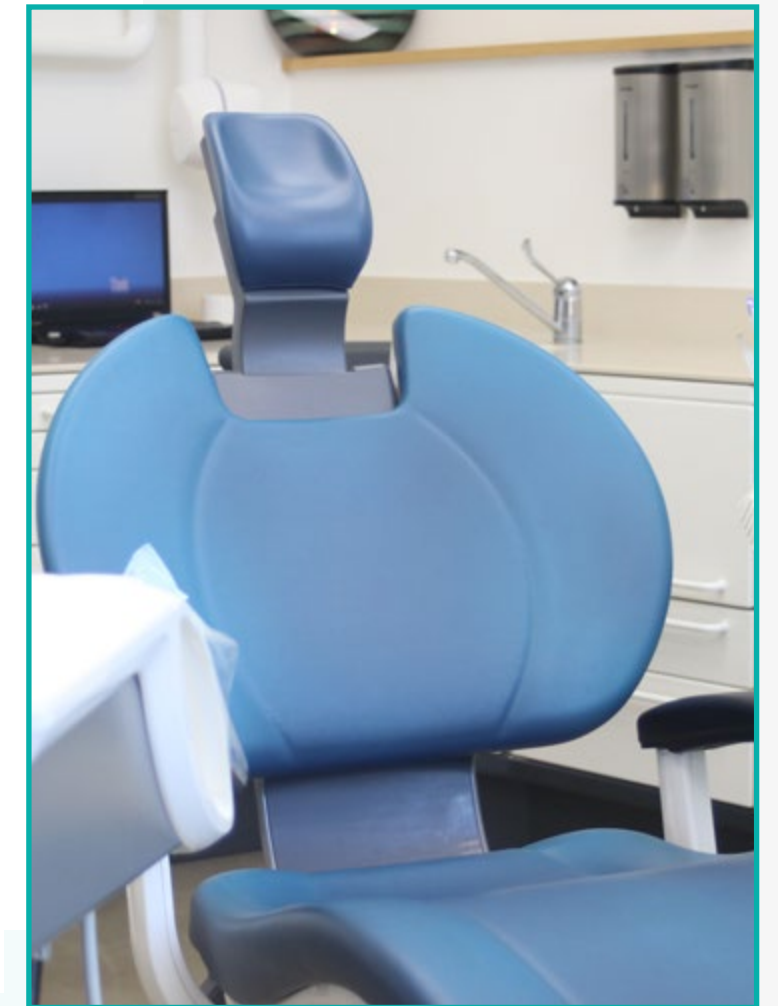
Please do not visit your dental practice without calling them first.

If you are not registered with a dental practice, you can find a list of the ones closest to you on the NHS website.

Before agreeing to see you, dental practices might need to speak with you on the telephone. This is to check whether you are in good health and do not have any symptoms relating to the coronavirus.

Dental treatment in hospitals and A&E

To support NHS services and protect vital resources, it is important that you do not visit hospitals or A&E departments with dental problems.



If you need urgent or emergency dental treatment, contact your dental practice and they will be able to refer you.

Dental care for vulnerable people and those with symptoms

If you need urgent dental care and are self-isolating because you have symptoms relating to coronavirus, or are a vulnerable person at higher risk, call NHS 111.

NHS 111 will be able to assess your needs and

shopping and we advise that you buy any oral health products you need during this time. Please remember however, to keep to social distancing rules and try to keep two metres away from other shoppers.

When possible, instead of visiting supermarkets, we recommend that you buy oral health products online and have them delivered to your home.

Top tips for good oral health

To help prevent dental problems from happening during coronavirus, here are some top tips for great oral health.

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If you are suffering with your oral health and need support, guidance or advice, the Oral Health Foundation is here to help throughout this period and beyond.

Dr Nigel Carter OBE,
Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation

refer you to a special team who will be able to treat you.

Buying oral health products

There is no shortage of oral health products like toothbrushes, toothpaste and mouthwash. Because of this, there is no need to stockpile them.

It is important to only buy what you need, when you need it.

Supermarkets remain open for essential food

- Brush your teeth for two minutes, twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- The best time to brush is last thing at night, before you go to bed.
- Cut down on how much sugar you have and how often you have it.
- Keep sugar consumption to mealtimes. This will reduce the time your teeth are under attack.



- Use interdental brushes or floss to clean in between the teeth.
- Use mouthwash daily to remove bad bacteria and keep fresh breath.
- Sugar-free chewing gum can help produce saliva and neutralise the plaque acids in your mouth.

More information and advice

Our Dental Helpline is here to answer any questions you have about your oral health. If you need help, support or reassurance about the health of your mouth, we're here to help.

For information about the coronavirus (COVID-19), please visit www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/.

If you are a dental professional, the [British Dental Association's website](#) has ongoing advice and updates about treating patients during this time.

The top five oral health pledges you can make today!

As part of World Oral Health Day 2020 we encouraged everyone to have a think about their oral health routines.

Just small changes in our oral health routine, such as using interdental brushes daily, can give our oral health a massive boost.

Remember, better oral health doesn't just mean cleaner teeth - it also can mean fresher breath, more confidence and even a reduction in our risk of strokes and heart disease.

To help give you some ideas of how you can change your oral health for the better below are our top five oral health pledges you can make from today.



Brush my teeth twice a day for two minutes with fluoride toothpaste

It's simple. You've probably heard it before. But honestly, if you don't do already do this, this is by far the most effective oral health pledge you can make to improve your oral health. Brushing twice a day not only makes sure your brushing off plaque and bacteria from your teeth and gums – the fluoride means that your teeth stay protected throughout the day.

For children up to three years old they should use a smear of toothpaste with a fluoride level of no less than 1000ppm (parts per million). After three years old we recommend using a pea-sized amount of toothpaste that contains 1350ppm to 1500ppm.

Cut down on acidic foods and drinks in my diet

I'm sure you've heard about the dangers of consuming too much sugar when it comes to oral health but do you know how acidic the foods you eat and drink are?

Acid harms your oral health by causing dental erosion – the weakening of the surface of your enamel. Enamel is the hard protective layer of your teeth and unfortunately it can't grow back so once it's gone, it's gone.

Acidity is measured pH. The lower the pH number, the more acidic the product. Anything with a pH value lower than 5.5 may cause erosion.

Here's the pHs of a few common foods and drinks that you may be consuming frequently without realising the effect they are having on your teeth:

- Cheddar cheese pH 5.9
- Lager pH 4.4
- Orange juice pH 3.8
- Cola pH 2.5
- Red wine pH 2.5

Visit my dentist regularly, as often as they recommend

This one is very important. Just like how you need to regularly take your car to be serviced, your mouth also needs servicing too and the dentist is in the best position to do it. You shouldn't just visit the dentist when you have a problem, by then, it's too late. By going regularly, as often as they recommend, you can stay on top of your oral health and stop oral health problems such as tooth decay before they've settled in. This will save you time and money as you won't need to go in for extra visits to sort out issues.

Remember the dentist and the wider dental team are there to support you in looking after your oral health, they're not there to 'tell you off' or simply to carry out fillings and extractions. They can be a great source of help and advice, use them!

Start using floss or interdental brushes

One question you might get during a dental visit is 'do you clean between your teeth?'. Statistics show that a lot of us fib and say we do so regularly when in actual fact sales of floss suggest that only about 5% of us actually do.

You might think it unnecessary but the bottom line is that whilst brushing your teeth is vital your toothbrush can't reach everywhere. Floss or interdental brushes get where your toothbrush can't – in between your teeth. By leaving these areas untouched they can become a breeding ground for plaque which can go on to cause both tooth decay and gum disease.

By making this pledge and sticking to it you'll not only just be making your dentist happy, your teeth and gums will really appreciate it too!

Snack healthier

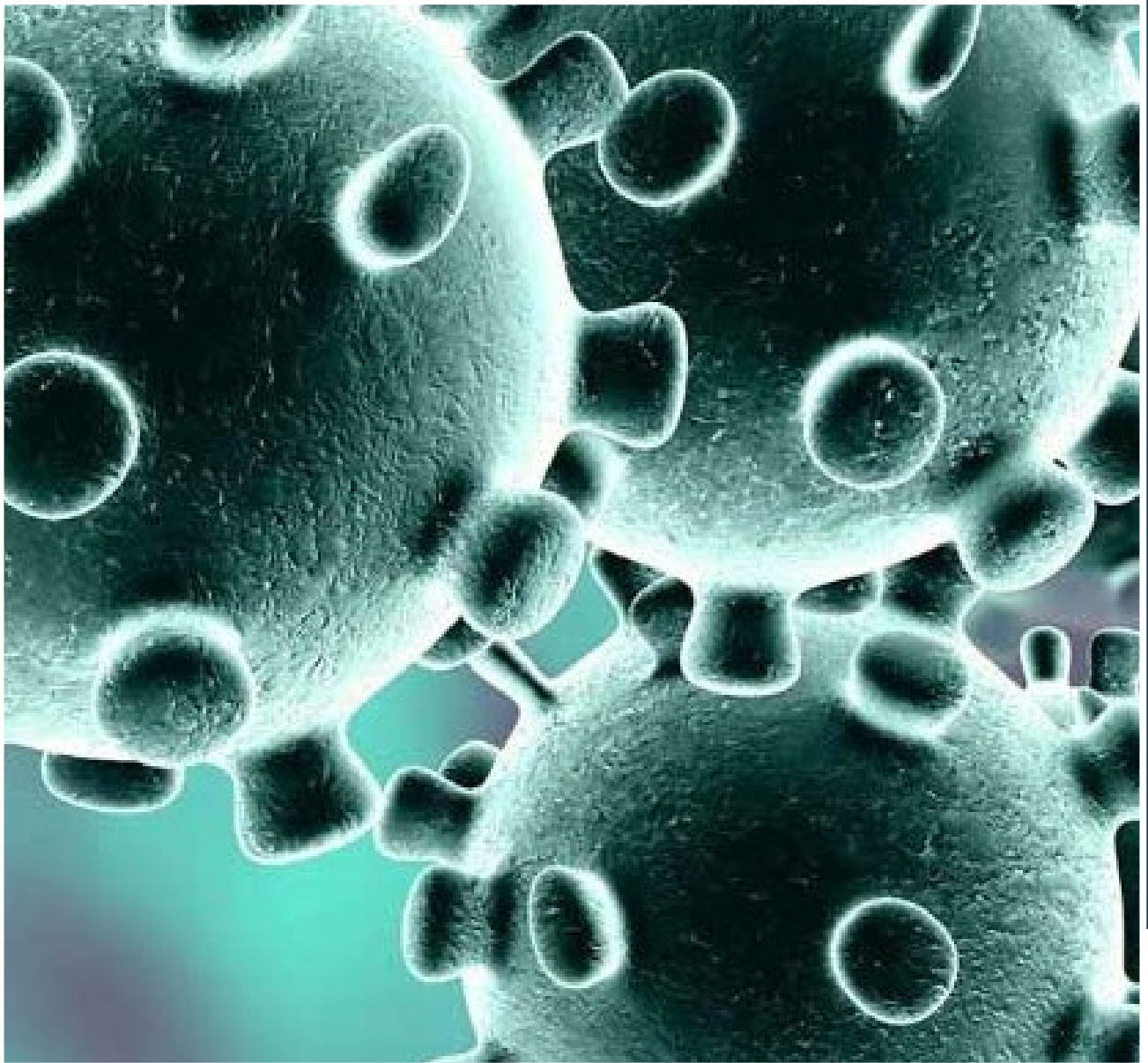
Seven in ten (70%) of us believe that snacking has an impact on our oral health. And we are absolutely right. Sugary snacks and confectionary still manage to attract us. It appears our sweet-tooth is hard to ignore.

For many, the secret to tackling snacking is not to cut it out altogether but to simply snack healthier. This means than instead reaching for the biscuit jar when you feel peckish, you grab a handful nuts or some cheese instead. These snacks are much more tooth friendly; they're non-acidic, low in sugar and will still give you the energy boost you need.

So there you have it. Five top oral health pledges you could make right now that would give a massive boost to your oral health. You don't have to take them all on at once, even just doing one is still a lot better than not doing any at all.

If you do take one on and see the benefits then make sure to tell your friends, family or colleagues so that they can try it too!





CORONAVIRUS

The Oral Health Foundation's Dental Helpline is here to help you with your queries, questions and concerns.

Get in touch and find out more about our Dental Helpline at www.dentalhealth.org/DentalHelpline

