



English
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But tooth loss may not be the only good reason to avoid gum disease - new research suggests this problem may also be linked to heart disease and stroke.

If you need help making phone calls in English, ring the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450.

You can find more health information in your language on the Multicultural Communication website at <http://mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au>

Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.

Keeping your teeth - whatever your age

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NSW HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

Keeping your teeth - whatever your age

The idea that tooth loss is a normal part of ageing is a myth - providing you take good care of your teeth, there's no reason why you shouldn't have as many teeth in your 70s as in your 20s.

Although most people understand that decay can damage teeth, not everyone realises that gum disease can also cause tooth loss.

Gum disease starts with plaque, a sticky substance created by food debris and bacteria which sticks to teeth. If plaque isn't removed regularly from teeth it builds up around the gum line causing gums to become swollen and inflamed. If this goes unchecked, the inflammation can eventually spread to the bones in the jaw which keep teeth in place. Gradually teeth can become loose and may fall out.

But this can be prevented by investing a few minutes every day carefully brushing teeth, as well as using dental floss to clean in between them. Dental floss is a product which looks a bit like sewing thread - you slide it in between your teeth to clean surfaces which a brush can't reach. Brush teeth twice a day using a brush with soft bristles and a small head - and replace the brush when the bristles look worn and shaggy. Brushing before bed is especially important because food debris lingering in your mouth overnight encourages bacteria which damages teeth and gums.

If you're not already using dental floss, now's a good time to start. Some people find it easier to use a similar product called dental tape. If you're not sure how to use dental floss or tape, your dentist or pharmacist can advise you. It's good to encourage children to use floss too. The age of eight or nine is a

good time to start - you may have to help them do it at first (and spend a lot of time reminding them) but it's worth the effort. If it makes it easier, why not floss while you watch TV?

If you want to make sure you've removed all the plaque from your teeth, you can ask your pharmacist for disclosing fluid to use at home. The idea is to swish the fluid around in your mouth and then spit it out. The fluid leaves coloured patches on your teeth (which you can brush away) which show where any remaining plaque is. You can also buy disclosing tablets which do the same thing.

Regular visits to the dentist for a check up and to have teeth cleaned will help remove any plaque you may have missed, and detect any gum problems early.

How can you tell if you have gum disease? Symptoms include gums that bleed when you brush them, a change in the colour or shape of the gums, persistent bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth, receding gums, or teeth that feel loose or which move position. Remember that bleeding gums are usually the earliest sign. Don't ignore them - see your dentist.

Because gum disease often develops during pregnancy, the Australian Dental Association says that looking after teeth and gums is an important part of antenatal care. Clean teeth carefully at this time and see a dentist.

Being a smoker or having diabetes can also increase the risk of gum disease.

Can gum disease be treated? Providing there's not too much bone loss, treatment by a dentist or periodontist (gum specialist), together with careful cleaning at home may prevent tooth loss.