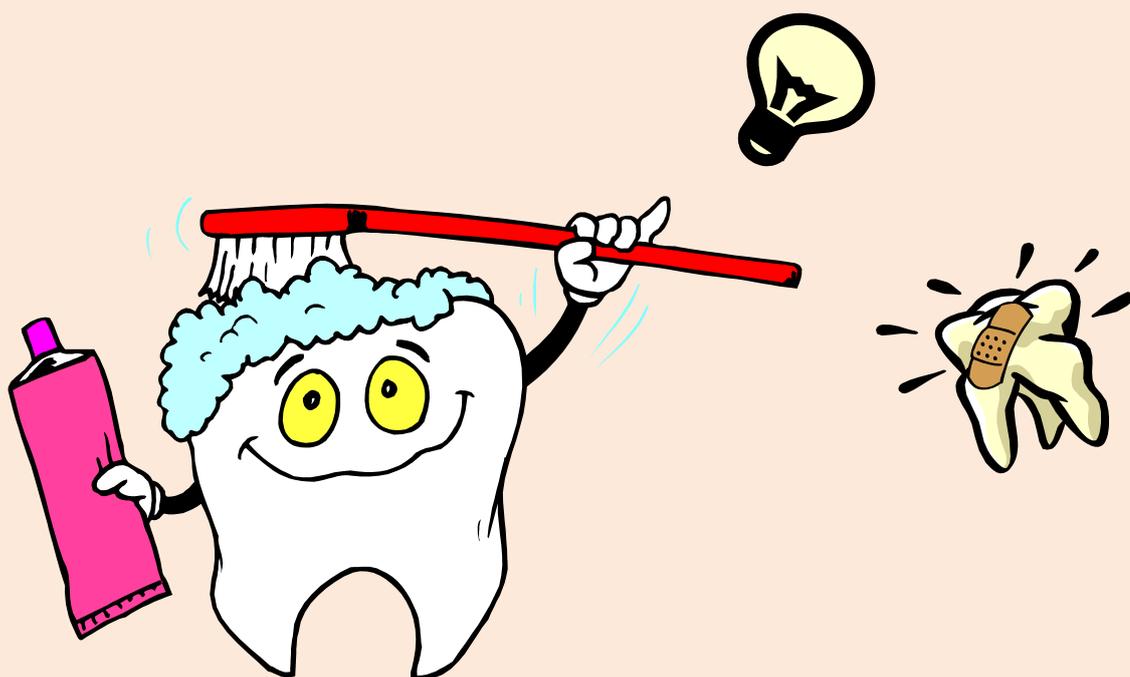


Dental Health Care for Older Adults

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

12.2015



Government Dental Service

1. Does the Government provide dental service to the public?

The Government provides the public with emergency dental service. The aim of the service is to relieve dental pain of the patients. It is a free service. The treatment includes extraction and medication. After the emergency treatment, the patients need to seek follow-up treatment from their dentists.

2. Where can emergency dental service be found?

Addresses, phone numbers and opening hours of Government clinics that provide emergency dental service can be found in the followings:

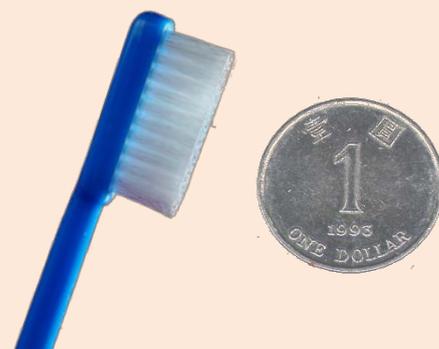
Oral Health Education Unit (OHEU) 24 hr. hot line: 2713 6344

Website: http://www.dh.gov.hk/english/tele/tele_chc/tele_chc_dcgps.html

Oral Health Care

3. How to choose a toothbrush?

It is essential that the toothbrush can move freely in one's mouth to clean every tooth surface. The bristles should be soft so that it does not injure the gums. The size of the toothbrush head should be appropriate to the size of the oral cavity. In general, the size of a toothbrush head which is about the diameter of a one dollar coin will be suitable for adults. The bristle pattern and handle design should be determined by personal preference and habit.



4. How often should toothbrush be changed?

Toothbrush should be changed about every 3 months. It should be replaced sooner if the bristles are splayed or after illness such as upper respiratory tract infection.



5. Is powered toothbrush better than manual toothbrush?

Both manual and powered toothbrushes clean the teeth effectively as long as they are used correctly. It has been shown that powered toothbrush with a rotation oscillation action reduce plaque and gingivitis more than that of manual toothbrush. However, to clean the teeth thoroughly, the most important is to adopt a proper and effective tooth brushing technique. For people with special needs, such as physically and mentally disabled people, choosing powered toothbrush may enhance the cleaning effect. The technique in using powered toothbrush is different from that of the manual toothbrush. You should consult your dentist to achieve an optimal cleaning effect if you choose to use powered toothbrush.

6. When should mouthwash be used? How to choose a mouthwash? What is the difference between mouthwash that contains alcohol and the ones that do not?

Depending on the active ingredients they contain, different types of mouthwash can be used to prevent tooth decay, reduce formation of dental plaque and gingivitis or reduce tooth sensitivity. It is advised to consult your dentist whether you need the mouthwash and follow his/her instruction on how to use it.

It has been shown that mouthwash that contains alcohol may irritate oral mucosa, it is advised to choose alcohol-free mouthwash.

7. Is denture adhesive suitable for elderly?

Denture adhesive is used to keep dentures in place during normal daily activity. Usually a well-made denture is retentive enough without the use of any adhesives. However, dentist may recommend using it in special cases. Any trial to use denture adhesives without knowing the cause of loose denture may result in more bone resorption, and make it harder to manufacture another good denture or even repair the old one. It is important to choose a zinc-free denture adhesive because chronic excessive intake of zinc can adversely affect general health.



8. How to clean a removable denture?

Dental plaque forms on the surface of a denture. In order to maintain the hygiene of the mouth and denture, the denture should be taken out for cleaning every night. First, fill the washing basin with some water to prevent accidental drop and fracture of the denture. Then, apply some detergent onto toothbrush and clean every surface of the denture, followed by rinsing with water. Finally, immerse the cleaned denture into a cup of water overnight. Avoid using toothpaste to clean the denture. The coarse particles in the toothpaste may scratch the surfaces of denture and enhance plaque accumulation.



9. How to clean the mouth of elderly without natural teeth?

The mouth of elderly without natural teeth should be swabbed every night. Soak a piece of gauze or clean towel with water and squeeze out excess water. Swab the cheek first, and then swab the other parts of the oral cavity in sequence of gum of upper arch, gum of lower arch, palate, top surface of the tongue, beneath the tongue and lips.

Diet and Healthy Teeth

10. What kind of food can make teeth healthy?

No food can change the structure of teeth but certain dietary habits can contribute to keep teeth healthy. Reducing the frequency of food and drink intake can prevent tooth decay. As soon as we eat, the neutral oral environment will become acidic which will lead to loss of minerals from tooth surfaces. Frequent snacking will result in persistent acidic environment in the mouth and insufficient time for saliva to neutralize the acid. The minerals at the tooth surface will continuously be lost and eventually cause dental caries. To avoid acid erosion of teeth, frequency of taking acidic food or beverages should be reduced. To avoid tooth fracture, one should avoid biting on hard food such as nuts, hard candies, ice cubes, bones, shells etc.



11. How soon should teeth be brushed after a meal?

Every time after intake of food or drink, the oral environment will become acidic and it will take 20-30 minutes for the acid to be neutralized. Brushing at this time will increase the loss of tooth substance. It is advised to brush, if needed, 30 minutes after intake of food or drinks. Thorough brushing of teeth twice every day is sufficient in maintaining healthy teeth.

Common Oral Disease and Treatment

12. What is sensitive teeth?

Sensitive teeth are mainly caused by exposed dentine. If enamel of tooth crown, or gum and cementum on root surface has been worn or lost, then the protective layer is lost and dentine will be exposed. The dentine has many fine dentinal tubules connecting to the pulp. The nerve endings in these fine tubules will be stimulated by eating or drinking hot, cold, sour or sweet food and beverages, or when it is contacted by a toothbrush or dental floss, resulting in the feeling of sharp pain.

Causes of exposed dentine:

- use of toothbrush with bristles that are too hard, or brushing with excessive force
- frequent consumption of highly acidic food or beverages
- habitual grinding of teeth (bruxism)
- gum disease or aging leading to gum recession
- the cementum covering the root is removed after receiving treatment of root planning

13. What is the function of desensitizing toothpaste? Do I need to use it?

Desensitizing toothpaste provide relief from dentine hypersensitivity in 2 ways. They interrupt the neurone response to pain stimuli or they occlude the dentinal tubules of dentine. There are many different types of desensitizing toothpastes marketed under different brand names, with different active ingredients such as Potassium Nitrate or Arginine. You are advised to consult the dentist and undergo a thorough check-up to explore the cause of tooth sensitivity before using desensitizing toothpaste. You should consult the dentist if the symptoms of tooth sensitivity persist after using desensitizing toothpaste.



14. What are the treatments for tooth decay?

The dentist may apply topical fluoride products with high fluoride concentration such that early tooth decay lesions can be repaired. A filling can be placed if the tooth decay lesion is relatively small and the structure of the tooth remains strong.

When tooth decay lesion is wide-spread, it may render the remaining tooth structure weak. A crown may have to be made for protection.

When tooth decay spreads into pulp, the pulp tissues are infected by the bacteria and may become necrotic. It causes severe pain and may lead to inflammation

or formation of abscess. Endodontic treatment (pulp treatment) is needed at this stage. If pulp treatment is not applicable, extraction will be necessary.



15. What is teeth grinding (bruxism)? What are the treatments for teeth grinding?

Teeth grinding is generally caused by psychological factors such as emotional stress or nervousness. Long term teeth grinding will damage the enamel and expose dentine causing sensitive teeth.

To reduce teeth grinding, one should maintain a positive attitude, have sufficient sleep and appropriate exercises to relieve stresses from daily life. To stop teeth grinding, the cause must be identified. If teeth grinding is severe, you should go to a dentist as soon as possible. The dentist will give appropriate treatment such as fabricating a “Mouth Guard” to keep the teeth from further attrition.

16. What methods are there to replace missing teeth? Which method is more long lasting?

Dental implant is a biocompatible (titanium) structure embedded in the jawbone which is used to support false teeth such as denture, bridge or crown.

Bridge is a fixed prosthesis that is used to replace one or more missing teeth. Neighboring teeth on both sides of the tooth space is grinded into appropriate shape according to the design of the bridge. The crowns on both ends of the bridge acts as anchors on the neighboring teeth and hold the bridge in place.

Denture is a removable set of false teeth.

