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*This brochure is available on the website of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in several languages. It can be copied and distributed freely.*

## ORAL HEALTH CARE

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*You can yourself look after your oral and dental health by having a healthy diet, brushing your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and visiting a dental clinic regularly. The parents should see to it that their children's teeth are taken care of and that children brush their teeth twice a day.*

### Oral health services

- You can get oral and dental care services at the local health centre. You can ask for more information about the services provided by the local health centre at the nearest health care station.
- People below 18 years of age obtain free dental care services at the health centre. Those aged 18 years and over have to pay the client fees charged by the health centre. If people aged 15 or over fail to attend the appointment and do not cancel it they are charged a fixed fee.
- You can also choose to visit a dentist in the private sector.
- Kela (The Social Insurance Institution) reimburses a part of the fee paid for private dental services; the total amount of the fee is not reimbursed however. Applications for reimbursement should be directed to Kela.
- A dentist, dental nurse and oral hygienist cooperate in an oral health care team.

### When should one seek dental care?

- If you suffer from toothache or other dental symptoms, contact the dental clinic of the health centre or your own dentist. Sudden illnesses and accidental injuries are treated as an emergency.
- Have your mouth and teeth examined at the intervals agreed on with your dentist or oral hygienist. Parents should look after that their children's mouth and teeth are regularly examined by a health care professional.
- Book an appointment early enough. You have a right of access to care within six months. In urgent cases you will get an appointment sooner.

Oral diseases may be far advanced before any symptoms in the mouth or teeth emerge. Therefore it is important to have regular oral health check-ups. Oral and dental health is linked with the overall health of the individual. General diseases, for instance diabetes or rheumatism, may worsen oral health and vice versa. Remember to tell your dentist and oral hygienist if you are pregnant, if you have a disease, or if you are regularly taking any medicines.



## The most common oral diseases in children

- Tooth decay progresses faster in children's than in adults' teeth. When the hard enamel surface of a tooth dissolves, a cavity will gradually develop in the tooth. That can be prevented by using regularly fluoride products, for instance fluoride toothpaste.
- Occlusion disorders are also common in children. They are treated with orthodontic care.
- Excessive drinking of soft drinks causes erosion of the surfaces of the teeth. Juice from a feeding bottle may also dissolve the tooth surface and cause tooth decay.

Sensitiveness and toothache can be symptoms of caries. Sometimes it is difficult to detect a cavity without the help of a health care professional. Tooth decay in children's teeth can start as soon as the first teeth erupt, and it progresses more rapidly than caries in adults. Tooth decay can be prevented by avoiding sweet snacks and drinks. In order to keep the teeth and mouth healthy children's teeth should be brushed twice a day with fluoride toothpaste – a little dab of it is enough.

Bacteria that cause oral diseases are passed from an adult to a young child via the adult's saliva. Don't put the baby's spoon or dummy (pacifier) in your mouth. A bacterial infection can be avoided when children use their own spoons and toothbrushes. An infection may also be transmitted through tasting the child's food or licking the baby's dummy.

## The most common oral diseases in adults

- Periodontal diseases are the most common oral disease in adults. These diseases are bacterial infections that may lead to tooth loss if left untreated. They can be prevented and treated by cleaning the mouth and teeth properly twice a day.
- Caries in adults' teeth is also common. The roots of adults' teeth are easily exposed and are prone to cavity formation. Tooth decay can also be prevented by a good diet.
- Smoking increases periodontal and oral mucous diseases.

Periodontal diseases include gingivitis and a more severe infection called periodontitis. If not treated, they may ultimately result in loss of teeth. The first symptoms might be bleeding of the gums when brushing the teeth. When the infection will progress you might suffer from bad breath.

## What are the reasons for the most common oral diseases?

Tooth decay and periodontal diseases are caused by the sticky but unnoticeable layer of bacteria, plaque, that forms on tooth surfaces. It hardens on the surfaces of the teeth forming a hard layer that is called tartar. You can detect gingivitis yourself since a symptom of it is bleeding from the gums when brushing your teeth. Smoking worsens diseases of the gums and prevents the emergence of symptoms since it constricts the flow of blood to the gums.

Sugar as well as foods and drinks containing it, for example sweets, juices and dried fruit, may cause cavities in your teeth. Unhealthy eating habits and poor brushing habits are harmful to oral health.

## What can you do yourself to promote your oral health?

Remove plaque from the surfaces of your teeth in the morning and evening by using a soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. Brush the marginal areas of gums and clean the spaces between teeth carefully.

Parents are responsible for the oral care of their children. Children can brush their teeth themselves when they reach school age. Before that they need help from their parents.

Dentures need to be cleaned regularly, too. This ensures that the mucous membranes of the mouth and the teeth that are possibly still present will stay healthy.

You should have every day a breakfast, lunch, dinner, an evening meal, and 1 to 2 lighter snacks, a total of 4 to 6 meals. After meals it is beneficial to use for instance Xylitol chewing gum. Have a well-balanced diet and drink water when you are thirsty.

Xylitol products are a good alternative to sweets. Xylitol is a natural product that protects your teeth and reduces caries.

You'll get further instructions for oral care at the dental clinic. There are particular instructions for expectant mothers, children's parents, schoolchildren, students, older people and people with different illnesses.

For further information please contact:

- your own dentist, oral hygienist or dental nurse
- the local health centre and website of the municipality of residence
- Kela (Social Insurance Institution) offices or [www.kela.fi](http://www.kela.fi) > In English