



MEDIA RELEASE
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TOOTH DECAY - AUSTRALIA'S MOST PREVALENT HEALTH CONDITION

Tooth decay is Australia's most common health problem, with five times the prevalence of that of asthma among children. 11 million newly decayed teeth develop each year. According to government reports, it's also the second most costly diet-related disease in Australia, which is all the more concerning given 90 per cent of all dental disease is preventable.

Research commissioned by the Australian Dental Association (ADA) reveals an alarming 57% of Australians expect at some stage in their lives they will develop tooth decay, a condition that can be unsightly, painful and irreversible. However, ADA's Oral Health Committee Chairman, Dr Peter Alldritt, says no one should expect to get tooth decay or accept that the condition is inevitable as it can be prevented with a healthy diet and proper dental care – the main messages of the ADA's 2012 Dental Health Week 6 – 12 August, 2012.

According to Dr Alldritt, the easiest way to avoid tooth decay is to be aware of what you eat and drink.

“The number one cause of tooth decay is consumption of sugary foods and drinks on a regular basis. The bacteria in your mouth convert sugars into acids. Over time, acids eat away at the surface of a tooth, attacking the enamel, weakening the tooth and causing decay in the form of holes or cavities.

“Preventing tooth decay can be as simple as controlling consumption of sugary or acidic food and drinks between meals, drinking soft drinks through a straw to minimise the acid exposure to your teeth and eating calcium rich foods like cheese and yogurt to help neutralise acids and protect your teeth, Dr Alldritt said.

Another easy way to prevent tooth decay is to maintain healthy oral hygiene habits such as brushing teeth twice a day and flossing once a day, yet more than 30% of Australians admit they are only brushing once daily, with most of us skipping the pre-bed brush, and many of us admit we avoid flossing altogether.

The study found almost 35% of parents report their children are only brushing once a day with more than 60% just accepting that their children will get tooth decay at some point in their lifetime.

While the habits suggest complacency when it comes to oral care, the overwhelming majority of Australians (83%) say that decayed teeth and bad breath are the biggest turn offs on a first date, far more concerning than excessive body odour (5%) or poor dress sense (4%), the survey revealed.

“It's clear from an aesthetics point of view, healthy teeth are important to us but it's concerning that so many Australians accept they or their children will at some point be affected by decay. This doesn't have to be the case and it certainly shouldn't make people complacent about their teeth,” Dr Alldritt says.

During Dental Health Week the ADA is urging Australians to rethink their attitudes to tooth decay and not accept or expect it, but rather practise better oral health habits and be aware of the damage certain foods and drinks can cause to teeth.

Being aware of what you eat and drink and avoiding copious amounts of sugary or acidic food and beverages is the easiest way to avoid tooth decay altogether. Brushing twice daily, flossing every day and visiting your dentist regularly will also go a long way to avoiding the condition.” Dr Alldritt said.

Tooth decay facts:

- The ADA states there are over 19 million decayed teeth in Australia and predicts 11 million additional decayed teeth each year
- Researchers have estimated that poor dental health contributes to 600,000 days lost from schoolⁱ and 1 million lost days of work each yearⁱⁱ
- The total direct costs and lost productivity due to poor dental health in Australia is \$2 billionⁱⁱⁱ

To prevent tooth decay:

- Avoid snacking on sugary or acidic foods and drinks between meals. Some foods like muesli and fruit bars might seem healthy, however if they are sugary or have a sticky texture, they may increase your risk of tooth decay
- Eating calcium rich foods like milk, cheese and yogurt can help to neutralise acids and protect your teeth
- Brush twice a day with fluoridated toothpaste – brushing can reduce your risk of decay by 25%
- Floss once a day – flossing removes food from between your teeth, which brushing can't reach. If the food is left between your teeth and forms plaque, you increase your risk of tooth decay
- Drink fluoridated tap water – Studies have estimated an 18-40% reduction^{iv} in tooth decay when children drink fluoridated tap water in conjunction with other sources of fluoride
- Chew sugarfree gum – There is evidence that chewing sugarfree gum increases the production of saliva, which helps protect your teeth against decay

For more information and fact sheets on tooth decay, visit www.noddecay.com.au

Dental Health Week is 6 –12 August

For more information on tooth decay, the ADA's Dental Health Week campaign, or to speak with an ADA spokesperson, please contact Porter Novelli Melbourne:

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ⁱ Spencer & Lewis 1988 *End the decay*, Brotherhood of St. Laurence

ⁱⁱ Richardson & Richardson 2007, *End the decay*, Brotherhood of St. Laurence

ⁱⁱⁱ Richardson & Richardson 2007, *End the decay*, Brotherhood of St. Laurence

^{iv} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Recommendations for using fluoride to prevent and control dental caries in the United States](#). *MMWR Recomm Rep*. 2001;50(RR-14):1–42. PMID 11521913. [Lay summary](#): CDC, 2007-08-09.