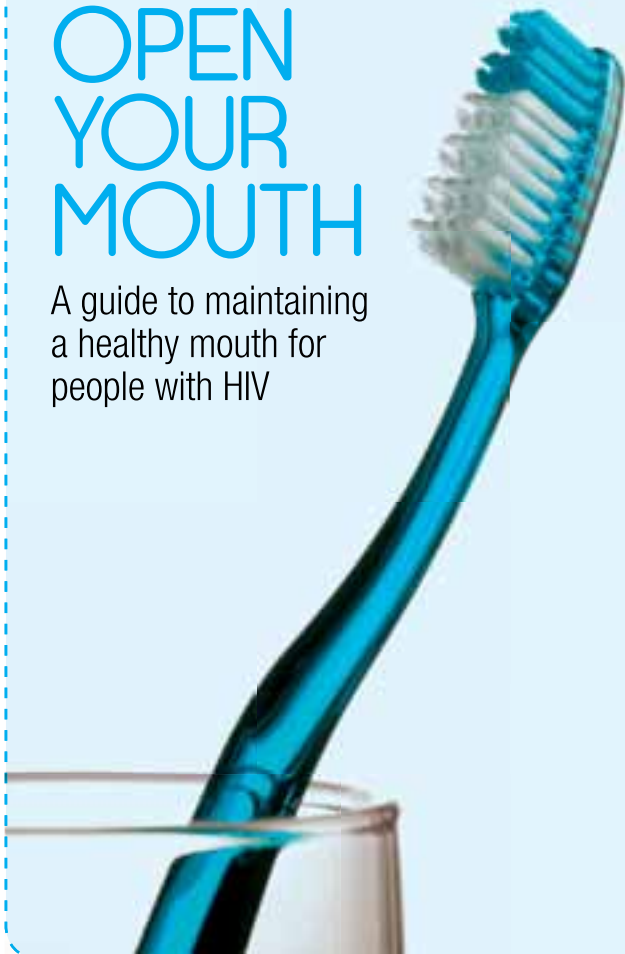


# OPEN YOUR MOUTH

A guide to maintaining  
a healthy mouth for  
people with HIV



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## GENERAL TIPS TO LOOK AFTER YOUR MOUTH

- ✓ Clean your teeth at least twice per day.
- ✓ Clean between your teeth every day.
- ✓ Have a dental check up every 6 months.  
You still need a dental check if you have dentures.
- ✓ Drink mostly tap water throughout the day.
- ✓ Avoid sugary and acidic foods and drinks.
- ✓ Limit the number of snacks you eat.
- ✓ Quit smoking.

## HIV AND ORAL HEALTH

If you are HIV positive you are more likely to have health problems because you have a compromised immune system. Your mouth is one of the first places to show changes caused by the virus and the medications used to manage HIV. Most HIV positive people will experience some changes.

## THE ROOT OF MANY DENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

The two major oral health conditions, decay and gum disease, are both caused by bacteria in a sticky film which grows on everyone's teeth every day. This is dental plaque. Dental plaque grows more quickly if you have a dry mouth.

## **TOOTH DECAY**

- Tooth decay is caused by bacteria above the gum which feed on the food you eat. They will grow faster when you eat sweet and sticky food and sugary drinks.
- Tooth decay can cause pain with hot or cold food and drinks and eventually cause strong pain and swelling of the gums. Changes to your diet and cleaning the plaque from your teeth can help prevent tooth decay.

## **GUM DISEASE (GINGIVITIS & PERIODONTITIS)**

- Gum disease is caused by bacteria below the gum line. It can cause bleeding and swelling but may not cause pain until it is advanced. In people who smoke gum disease is harder to detect.
- Early gum disease is called gingivitis and can be improved by cleaning properly. Advanced gum disease (periodontitis) will cause loss of teeth and has an effect on diabetes and increases your risk of heart disease.

- The bacteria that cause gum disease can give you bad breath.
- If left untreated gum disease can advance very quickly in people with HIV who are not taking ART (antiretroviral therapy) or when their medications are not effective.

## **DRY MOUTH**

- HIV can damage the saliva glands. Saliva is the fluid which keeps your mouth moist, makes eating and speaking more comfortable and reverses acid damage. Dry mouth means you do not have a protective layer of saliva over the teeth and gums
- If you do not drink enough fluids your body cannot make enough saliva. Alcohol strips normal saliva from your mouth. The caffeine in coffee, soft drinks and tea can also cause dry mouth.
- Many common medications and ART can cause dry mouth. Dry mouth can interrupt sleep, make eating difficult, increase mouth ulcers and cause bad breath and taste changes.

## OTHER ORAL PROBLEMS

### ULCERS AND FUNGAL INFECTIONS

- Ulcers and fungal infections can be worse in people with HIV, especially in people with a lower immune function. Ulcers or sore patches on gums have many causes such as trauma, infections and cancer. Have a health care provider check any ulcers or red or white patches in your mouth.
- Fungal infections like candida look like red or white patches on gums around teeth, on the inside of cheeks, on the tongue or the floor of the mouth. They can be painful. If you wear a denture all the time you are more susceptible to fungal infections that can be difficult to control and may require medication.

**Oral health problems if left untreated can cause bad breath. This may have an impact on your self-esteem and social life.**

## TASTE CHANGES

- Taste changes are common in dry mouth and can be associated with a number of causes including upper respiratory tract infections (URTI), age related loss of function of taste buds, infections in the mouth or as a side effect from medication. Persistent taste change should be investigated by your doctor or dentist.

## OTHER THINGS TO GET CHECKED OUT

### DRY MOUTH

**Pigmentation** can occur more frequently on your gums and cheeks when you have HIV. Talk to your doctor or dentist to get it checked.

**Warts** can occur on your gums and cheeks.

**Hairy Tongue** is not serious but can make it hard to clear food from your mouth. You might need to brush your tongue to make your mouth feel fresh.

*Tips to manage some of the symptoms of the common oral health problems are describe on page 24*



A healthy mouth can help you:

- ✓ Feel good
- ✓ Look good
- ✓ Enjoy your sex life
- ✓ Speak well
- ✓ Eat well

## HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Healthy lifestyles help people with HIV in maintaining a healthy mouth. Eating well, drinking plenty of tap water and good oral hygiene will help achieving and maintaining a healthy mouth.

## EATING AND DRINKING WELL

What you eat and drink plays a major role in dental caries (tooth decay) and enamel (outside layer of the tooth) erosion.

Tooth decay is caused by bacteria which can grow very aggressively in your mouth from the remains of your food. Particularly when you eat sticky and sugary foods and drinks, such as sweets, lollies, sport drinks, energy drinks, carbonated mineral water, vitamin waters, cordial, fruit juices and any food that contains sugars (e.g. biscuits, crackers, potato chips, dried fruit, snack and muesli bars). People who graze throughout the day will also have more plaque.

It is not always easy or practical to completely cut out all foods that contribute to tooth decay but knowing some basic facts about tooth-friendly eating and drinking habits can help you to maintain a healthy mouth.

## FLUIDS

- Drink plenty of tap water, especially after eating sweet or sticky foods. Tap water is best as it contains fluoride, most bottled water does not contain fluoride. Drinking a glass of water first thing in the morning and sipping water during the day helps clear ‘bits and pieces’ from your mouth that can cause dental caries.
- Limit intake of sugary drinks such as juice, soft drinks, vitamin waters, flavoured milks, sweetened tea and coffee, sweetened iced teas, energy drinks and sports drinks.
- To reduce exposure and damage by acids:
  - Use a straw when consuming acidic drinks (including juice, ‘regular’ and diet soft drinks, sports drinks, even mineral water) and avoid sipping for long periods.

- Do not hold or swish acidic drinks in your mouth.
- Avoid acidic drinks before you go to bed.
- Drink tea with no sugar instead of coffee.
- Use sugar substitutes for hot drinks if you need to sweeten hot drinks.
- Choose cordials without sugar, e.g. diet cordials or add fresh herbs like mint to flavour water.
- Rinse your mouth with water after taking liquid nutritional supplements, especially between meals.



Chewing sugar free chewing gum for 15 minutes will increase saliva.

Note: chewing large amounts of sugar free gum may give you diarrhoea.



## FOODS

- Eat a variety of foods from each of the five major food groups, including; whole grains, fruits, vegetables, lean sources of protein such as lean beef, skinless poultry and fish, dry beans, peas and other legumes, and low-fat and fat-free dairy foods (include at least 2-3 serves each day as these are protective for your teeth).
- Limit the number of snacks you eat. Frequent snacking can cause more harm to your teeth because there is less saliva production than during a main meal. The role of saliva is to wash foods from the mouth and it reduces the harmful effects of any acids.
- Choose healthy foods, if you chose to snack like fresh fruit, low fat and low sugar yoghurt, vegetable sticks or soups, unsalted nuts or a piece of low fat cheese.
- Eat a meal that includes crunchy fresh food if you choose to eat high sugar or sticky foods such as lollies, chocolates, cakes or biscuits. Make sure you also drink water with this food.

- Avoid having acidic foods last thing at night e.g. fruit, pickles or even chewable vitamin C tablets.
- Avoid tooth brushing immediately after any acidic foods or drinks as this can cause tooth enamel to wear away.

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods  
**from these five food groups every day.**  
 Drink plenty of water.

Grain (cereal) foods,  
 mostly wholegrain  
 and/or high cereal  
 fibre varieties



Lean meats and  
 poultry, fish, eggs,  
 tofu, nuts and seeds  
 and legumes/beans

Vegetables and  
 legumes/beans



Fruit

Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or  
 alternatives, mostly reduced fat

[www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines/australian-guide-healthy-eating](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines/australian-guide-healthy-eating)

## QUIT SMOKING

Smoking can make gum disease harder to detect at the same time as making it worse. Smokers can develop a very painful and smelly gum infection called NUP (necrotising ulcerative periodontitis). If you are not taking ART it can be very aggressive and you can lose a lot of bone around your teeth. This bone and gum does not grow back leaving big gaps around the teeth or may cause you to lose your teeth. Talk to a health professional for more information.

### **Quitting can be hard but...**

It is one of the most rewarding things you can do to improve your overall health, including your mouth. There are many benefits to quitting, some even occur within hours of your last cigarette. Once you stop smoking you are less likely to have bad breath, stained teeth and stained tongue. You will find breathing easier especially on exertion and in the long term you will reduce your risk of gum disease, tooth loss and cancer of the throat, mouth, lips or gums.





## USEFUL SUPPORT

Smoking - talk to a health professional or call **Quitline 13 7848** or call **Positive Life NSW 02 9206 2177** for quit smoking programs for PLHIV.

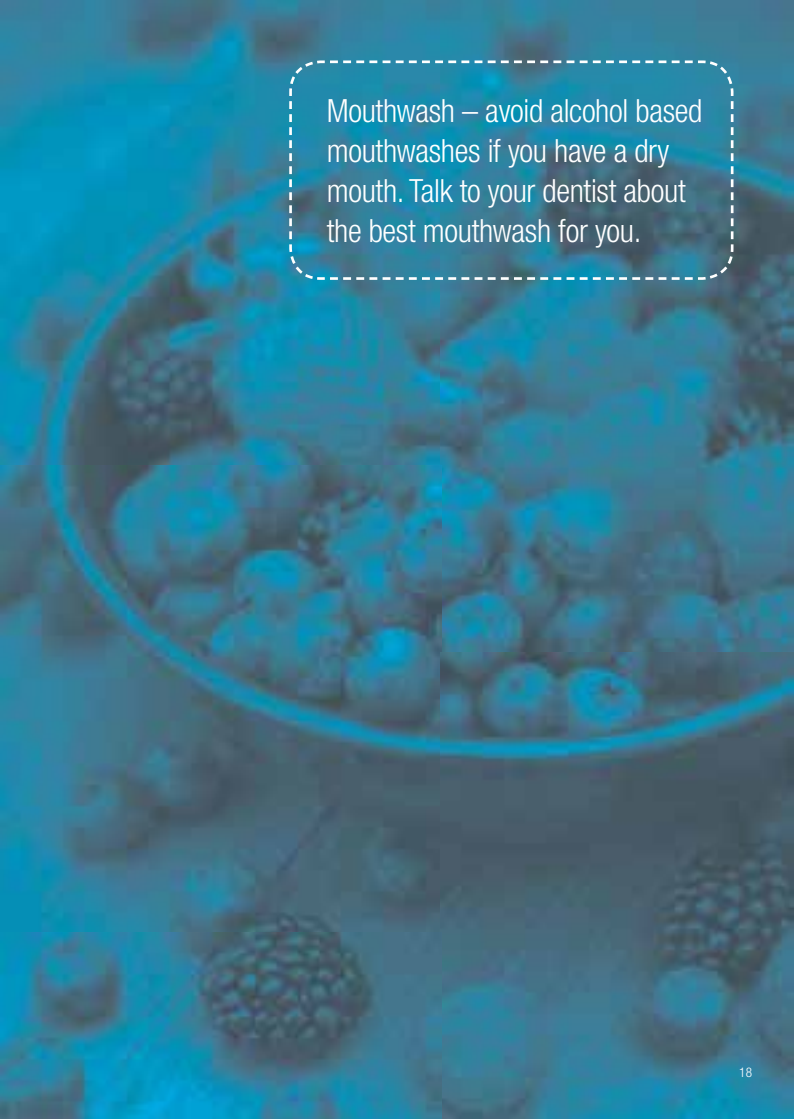
Alcohol and/or drugs - talk to a health professional or call Alcohol & Drug Information Service on **02 9361 8000** or from country NSW **1800 422 599**.

## REDUCE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Excessive alcohol use can increase dehydration and a dry mouth. All alcohol is acidic and some drinks contain lots of sugars that bacteria in the mouth can use to produce more acid. Increased acid combined with less saliva production can severely erode teeth.

This erosion destroys white enamel on the outside of teeth and makes teeth look darker and more sensitive to hot and cold.

If you drink alcohol, limit your intake to two standard drinks per day (for both men and women). One standard drink is 80-100ml of wine, 30ml spirit, 1 middy of beer (285ml).

A photograph of a bowl filled with fresh fruit, including raspberries, blueberries, and strawberries, set against a light, neutral background. The bowl is positioned in the center of the frame, and the fruit is arranged in a somewhat circular pattern. The lighting is soft and even, highlighting the natural colors and textures of the berries.

Mouthwash – avoid alcohol based mouthwashes if you have a dry mouth. Talk to your dentist about the best mouthwash for you.

# THE EFFECT OF PRESCRIPTION AND ILLICIT DRUGS ON YOUR MOUTH

The regular and excessive use of recreational/illicit drugs can cause dry mouth, teeth grinding, and jaw clenching potentially leading to gum problems, and tooth decay.

Some prescribed medications can also cause tooth decay if they are acidic or reduce saliva (your natural defence against acid attack). Ask your dentist and prescribing doctor for advice on minimising the harm from any drug.





## CLEAN YOUR TEETH

Good oral hygiene is important to reduce the build up of bacteria on your teeth and gums. Brushing the flat surfaces and cleaning between your teeth helps to prevent tooth decay and gum disease.

Bacteria will grow thickly in crevices near the gums and between the teeth. They produce acid which removes mineral from the tooth surface and toxins which cause gum disease. Physical removal is needed to remove the film of bacteria. Water and mouthwash will not wash it away. Fluoride can replace some of the mineral which is removed from the tooth surface by bacterial acid.

Following these recommendations for cleaning your teeth will decrease the risk of developing tooth decay, gum disease and other dental problems.

- Look at and feel your toothbrush (hand brush or electric toothbrush). Choose soft bristles and a small head toothbrush.
- Replace your toothbrush every 2 months or earlier if the bristles are bent.
- Brush your teeth for at least 2 minutes each time with 10 circular movements of the brush per tooth.
- Clean between your teeth with an interdental brush or floss every day before brushing your teeth.
- Use a small amount of fluoride toothpaste for all natural teeth.
- Get your dentist or hygienist to show you the best way to clean your teeth and any special places like crowns or implants.
- Rinse your mouth with water after vomiting or drinking acidic drinks. Brush with fluoride toothpaste after 30 minutes.

- You can brush your tongue or use a special scraper if it collects lots of food.

Some people need to wear partial or complete dentures to replace missing teeth. Like natural teeth, dentures attract plaque, become stained and collect food particles that can cause bad breath or irritate your gums. Keeping your dentures clean is vital for good oral health.

The following are some tips to look after your dentures.

- Use a soft brush and unscented mild bar soap and water to clean your denture to avoid scratches. Don't use toothpaste to clean denture teeth.
- Clean your denture over a cloth in the basin to avoid damage if you drop it.
- Clean or rinse your denture after every meal.
- Remove full and partial dentures before bed and keep in water overnight so your gums can be bathed in saliva which is protective for your mouth.
- You can also soak your denture using a special solution or tablets. Ask your dentist for details.

## SEX AND YOUR MOUTH

Although oral sex is considered a low risk activity for HIV transmission, oral sex is an efficient mode of transmission for STIs (sexually transmissible infections). There are a small number of recorded cases of people getting HIV from performing oral sex and taking ejaculate into their mouth.

The risk can be reduced if your mouth is healthy, that is, there are no sores, tears, abrasions, inflamed or bleeding gums which may allow HIV or an STI to enter. Avoid ejaculate and menstrual blood in your mouth.





## TIPS TO MANAGE SYMPTOMS OF SOME OF THE COMMON ORAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

### **Dry mouth:**

- Keep well hydrated with plenty of water.
- Drink water every time you drink tea, coffee or alcohol.
- Carry a water bottle and sip water throughout the day.



- Saliva substitutes from the chemist such as moisturising gels can be used. Olive oil can be rubbed on your gums.
- Saliva will increase when you chew e.g. sugar free gums or lollies, hard foods e.g. raw vegetable sticks and fruits like apples.
- Use a lip balm, lipstick or sun protection lip product if your lips are dry or cracked.
- Ask your health care professional for more information on any of the above.

## **Painful mouth:**

- Get a health professional to check it out first.
- Clean slowly and carefully to reduce the number of bacteria in your mouth.
- Choose foods that are soft and smooth such as eggs, baked boneless fish, canned fruit, soups, pasta dishes, custard, puddings, yoghurt, tender meat and vegetables.



- Blend, mince and chop food finely to reduce chewing time.
- Avoid acidic, spicy and salty foods. Allow very hot food to cool for up to 30 minutes.

- Make dry foods softer by dipping them in liquids such as milk and soups.
- Drink plenty of cool fluids, especially with meals to help moisten the food.

### **Taste changes:**

- Keep your mouth clean and rinse your mouth before you eat to clean your palate.
- Use marinades, gravies and sauces to alter taste of meats if meat tastes unusual to you.
- Add spices, herbs, lemon juice, onion, pepper or vinegar to foods you find too sweet or bland.
- Use plastic cutlery and try not to drink out of metallic containers if food tastes metallic.
- Vary the texture (e.g. smooth, crunchy, rough), colour, and temperature of foods you eat to enjoy the way food feels and looks.
- Try a straw for liquids: an easy way to bypass your tastebuds.



## GENERAL TIPS TO LOOK AFTER YOUR MOUTH

- ✓ Clean your teeth at least twice per day.
- ✓ Clean between your teeth every day.
- ✓ Have a dental check up every 6 months.  
You still need a dental check if you have dentures.
- ✓ Drink mostly tap water throughout the day.
- ✓ Avoid sugary and acidic foods and drinks.
- ✓ Limit the number of snacks you eat.
- ✓ Quit smoking.

## ORAL HEALTH SELF ASSESSMENT

Ask yourself:

- 1 Has it been more than 1 year since you have been to the dentist?
- 2 Do you have tooth pain, mouth sores, bleeding gums or loose teeth?
- 3 Do you often have a dry mouth or experience a change in your sense of taste?

You need to see a dentist if you answer **YES** to any of these questions.

Ask your health professional for advice on keeping your mouth healthy.

Have regular dental check ups – don't wait until there is a problem.

## DENTAL HEALTH SERVICES SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE FOR PEOPLE WITH HIV

Information on private dentists, financial assistance or subsidised dental services for people with HIV who hold a health care card or pension card can be accessed by:

Calling:

**1800 451 600**

Going to:

**[www.dental.positivelife.org.au](http://www.dental.positivelife.org.au)**

**[www.ada.org.au](http://www.ada.org.au) (private dentists)**

A dietitian can provide advice on eating if symptoms are present. Contact your local hospital or clinic or find a dietitian at

**<http://daa.asn.au/for-the-public/find-an-apd>**





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