

WHAT

DENTISTS

wish you knew

With the right know-how, you can keep your pearly whites in great condition.

Patricia Flokis asked the experts for their top tips



“DON'T GIVE UP ON FLOSSING.”

The majority of people do not floss their teeth daily. Patients tell me, 'I tried flossing but it made my gums bleed, so I stopped.' But gums bleed because gingivitis (a type of gum disease) makes them inflamed so you need to keep flossing to get them healthy again. Instead of giving up,

interpret the bleeding as a sign you've got a problem and work on it. Floss once a day and you should notice the bleeding becoming less each day, stopping completely after about a week. If not, see your dentist. Remember, failing to floss daily increases your risk of tooth decay between the teeth, gum disease and bad breath.

– **Dr Peter Alldritt**
Chairman, Oral Health Committee, Australian Dental Association



“AVOID BRUSHING YOUR TEETH TOO HARD.”

Brushing too hard can cause tooth abrasion and contribute to gum recession. Instead of gripping your toothbrush like a hammer, hold it lightly in your fingertips, where you can still control your brushing technique without hurting your teeth and gums. Plaque is a thin,

sticky film that comes off easily – it doesn't need brute force. Having to change your toothbrush every few weeks rather than every three months may be a sign you're brushing too hard.

– **Dr Derek Lewis**
Dentist, Queensland



“IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO PERFECT YOUR SMILE.”

Providing your teeth and gums are healthy, you're never too old for straighter teeth or a better bite. If you need braces there are aesthetic options available including clear aligners and lingual braces, which are traditional braces fitted behind the teeth, as well as tooth-coloured or clear braces. And often we can realign one or two crooked teeth with a partial brace or removable appliance.

– **Dr Helen McLean**
Orthodontist, Victoria Park Dental Specialists, Adelaide



“LOLLIES ARE NOT THE ONLY WAY YOU CAN DAMAGE YOUR TEETH.”

The number one cause of tooth decay is frequent consumption of sugary foods and drinks. Bacteria use the sugar in sweets to create acid which dissolves the mineral

within teeth, causing holes. But it does the same with any food that contains sugars including carbohydrates such as fresh and dried fruit, peanut butter, crackers, potato chips, snack or muesli bars and popcorn. Also, tooth enamel can be worn away by highly acidic food and drinks.

To protect teeth, choose snacks like vegetables, nuts and cheese and wash them down with drinks like milk or preferably fluoridated tap water. Also, have soft drinks or fruit juice in moderation, preferably with a meal, using a straw.

– **Associate Professor Lena Lejmanoski**
Chair, Oral Health Committee, Australian Dental Association (WA).



“YOU NEED TO BRUSH YOUR GUMS.”

The only thing that can prevent gum disease is having a good brushing method. Bacteria like to sit along and under the gum line where, the longer they're left, the more damage they can do to your oral and general health. Focus on brushing your gums, not just the teeth. Use a soft toothbrush to gently and thoroughly clean every gum line in your mouth inside and out, for two minutes minimum, twice a day.

– **Dr K.Y. Zee**
Periodontist, NSW



“THE WAY YOU BREATHE CAN AFFECT YOUR ORAL HEALTH.”

If you breathe through your mouth all the time, either through habit or because of nasal obstruction, you're less likely to have the correct volume of saliva in your mouth, which puts you at a greater risk of tooth decay. Saliva remineralises teeth and washes away bacteria, but if your mouth is too dry then bacteria can grow more rapidly. Certain medications can cause a dry mouth. Maintaining hydration and good oral hygiene is vital.

– **Dr Charlotte de Courcey-Bayley**
Holistic dentist, St Leonards Holistic Dental Care, Sydney



“MAKE SURE YOU SEE A DENTIST'S REAL WORK.”

If you're considering cosmetic procedures such as teeth whitening or porcelain veneers, ensure the before-and-after pictures a dentist shows you are their own as some use pictures that aren't. A good dentist should be open to questions, offer a

range of options, explain the pros and cons of each procedure, and make sure your mouth is healthy before proceeding with any of them.

– **Dr Yvonne King**
Aesthetic dentist, Cosmetic & Laser Dentistry Centre, Melbourne

“YOU DON'T NEED TO LIVE WITH MISSING TEETH.”

If you're missing teeth, consider dental implants. In the last two decades implant technology has improved significantly, as have the bone grafting techniques needed to replace areas of missing bone, so we're able to use them successfully in more complex situations. Implants last longer than most natural teeth and rarely have to be replaced. They're expensive, \$4000 to \$5000 each, but that is comparable to other techniques available to replace missing teeth.

– **Associate Professor Alf Nastri**
Head of Unit, Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery, Royal Melbourne Hospital

