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Consumer Oral Health Survey 2016

That's the world of Denplan for you.



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Introduction

Welcome to the 2016 Consumer Oral Health Survey.

Every year, Denplan, the UK's leading dental payment plan provider, runs a comprehensive consumer survey to explore how people feel about their oral health and dental care. This provides invaluable insights into how often people visit the dentist, their oral health habits, what's important to them from their dental practice, and much more.

This year, as well as asking about key factors such as dental attendance and oral health habits, we also asked consumers about their sugar consumption, children's oral health, and their understanding of the links between their oral health and overall wellbeing.

To support the data throughout the report, we've provided insights from our in-house dentists. If you'd like to know more about the research, or would like a quote from one of our experts, please just let us know.



For more information, contact the Denplan press office on 01962 828000 or email pressoffice@denplan.co.uk

For information, tips and advice on how you can look after your oral health visit www.denplan.co.uk/myteeth

The survey data

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 5,152 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 11th - 20th January 2016. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

Who goes to the dentist and why?

In the UK, adults are usually advised by their dentist how often they should visit for a dental check-up and it will vary according to the patient's individual oral health needs. Generally all adults should ensure they visit their dentist at least once every two years. Our research showed that this is not always the case though...

Just under half of adults (**44%**) said they visit the dentist for a routine check-up every six months. Patients on a monthly dental payment plan are the most likely to visit the dentist every six months (**92%**)

77% of adults said they visit the dentist regularly for a routine check-up (at least once every two years). While this is a good majority, it does mean that almost **one in four** people are missing out on this important health check.



“Regular dental visits are important for both your oral health and overall wellbeing. Your dentist can spot potential dental problems before they start, reducing the need for invasive or expensive dental treatment. They’ll also check for mouth cancer at every appointment which, if caught early, significantly improves survival rates. Your dentist may also be able to detect signs of other medical conditions in your mouth.”

Henry Clover, Denplan's Chief Dental Officer



32%

of adults said they are scared of the dentist. Patients on a monthly dental payment plan, such as Denplan, were the least likely to be scared of the dentist (**15%**)

10%

of adults said they only visit the dentist when in pain



52%

of NHS patients who regularly visit the dentist (at least once every two years) said they would consider paying privately for dental care



7%

of adults said they never visit the dentist



39%

of adults said they have visited a hygienist for a scale and polish. Patients on a monthly dental payment plan are the most likely to have ever visited a hygienist (**69%**)

52%

of adults said they would cancel a dental appointment if they had financial worries. Patients on a dental payment plan, such as Denplan, are the least likely to cancel an appointment due to financial worries, with only **28%** saying they would do this

The nation's brushing and flossing habits

A good oral health routine is essential for keeping your teeth and gums healthy, and could help you to avoid more complicated dental problems further down the line. Currently, dentists advise that most people should brush their teeth for two minutes, twice a day, as well as cleaning between their teeth daily. However, our research has uncovered that there are some very different oral health habits out there!

How often do we brush our teeth?

72% of adults brush their teeth at least twice a day

23% of adults brush once a day

2% of adults brush less than once a day

2% of adults never brush at all!

How do we brush? Of those who brush their teeth:

59% use a manual toothbrush most often

41% use an electric toothbrush most often

“The majority of UK adults are brushing twice a day, which is good news, but that still leaves over a quarter of the population brushing only once a day or less.

A proper brushing routine helps to prevent tooth decay and gum disease by removing plaque – the sticky coating of bacteria on your teeth – and food particles. It also helps to freshen breath and lift surface stains.

If you don't think you're brushing for the recommended two minutes, many electric toothbrushes have built-in timers to help guide you, or you can download brushing apps that can play two minutes of music through your phone or tablet.”

Henry Clover, Denplan's Chief Dental Officer

How long do we brush for on average? Of those who brush their teeth:

62% brush for at least two minutes each time

30% brush for one minute

5% brush for 30 seconds or less!

How often do we clean between our teeth?

35% of adults said they never floss

22% of adults floss at least once a day

Why don't some people floss more often?

We asked those adults who don't floss regularly (at least once a day) why they don't clean between their teeth more often. The top reasons were:

26% said it takes too long

22% said it made their gums bleed or hurt

20% said they didn't know why they didn't

18% said they can't do it properly

Why is cleaning between your teeth beneficial?

Despite the majority of adults not flossing regularly, or not at all, a large proportion know the benefits of cleaning between their teeth:

65% think it helps avoid gum disease

59% think it helps to avoid tooth decay

45% think it helps to avoid bad breath



“For a dental practitioner, getting your patients to clean in between their teeth is probably one of the biggest challenges. However, it really does make a big difference to your oral health, as brushing alone only reaches about 70% of tooth surfaces. It's clear from our research that the majority of patients do understand the importance and benefits of flossing, and yet that doesn't always seem to translate into action!

If you haven't flossed for a while, you may find your gums bleed slightly or are a little tender at first, but this soon goes away with regular flossing so don't let this put you off. You'll also find that you soon become more dextrous at flossing and it won't take longer than a couple of minutes to do.

There are lots of options available to clean between your teeth including floss, interdental brushes, floss harps and electric water or air flossers. Speak to your dental team about the most effective ways for you to floss.”

Henry Clover, Denplan's Chief Dental Officer

Children's oral health

Getting your child off to the right start with their dental care can make all the difference to their future oral health. We asked parents of children aged 18 or under how often they take their child to the dentist, their brushing habits, and their diet.

How often do children (aged 18 or under) visit the dentist for a routine check-up?

62%  At least once every six months

21%  At least once every year

4%  At least once every two years

1%  Less often than every two years

2%  Only when in pain

5%  Never

6%  Parents who don't know

Only one in five parents of children aged 18 or under (19%) said they first took their child to the dentist before **12 months** of age. The majority (**37%**) said they took them when their child was aged between **one and two years old**, and **almost a quarter (22%)** said they waited until their child was aged between **three and four**.

“It's best to take your child for their first dental appointment when their milk teeth start to appear, which is usually around six months of age.

Taking your child to the dentist from an early age helps to get their dental routine off to a positive start. They can get used to the sights, sounds and smells of a dental practice and get to know the team. Also any dental problems, such as tooth decay, can be more easily spotted and treated early on before they need more invasive treatment. Waiting until your child is a toddler could prove trickier and they may have already developed some dental problems.”

Henry Clover, Denplan's Chief Dental Officer



Almost two thirds of parents (**60%**) said they find it challenging to get their child to brush for the recommended two minutes, twice a day.

Children's eating habits

One in five parents of children aged 18 or under (21%) said they aren't confident that they're giving their children food and drinks that are healthy for their teeth

Nearly half of parents (43%) said they find it challenging to ensure their child has tooth-friendly snacks

28% said they find challenging to ensure their child has tooth-friendly meals

Over a third (37%) said they find it challenging to ensure their child has tooth-friendly drinks

Over a third of parents (34%) admit that they sometimes use sugary foods/drinks as a reward/bribe in order for their child to behave. **6%** said they often do this



“Young children tend to rush their brushing and can miss areas in their mouth, especially the back teeth and sides. It's advisable to supervise their brushing until they're at least seven years old and help them brush any areas they miss.

Children can often be reluctant to brush, but there are things you can do to ensure brush time is fun. Toothbrushes featuring their favourite character, brushing songs, apps, timers and reward charts can turn the two minutes into a fun time rather than a chore. Your dental team will also have lots of ideas, so it's worth asking them for further tips.”

Henry Clover, Denplan's Chief Dental Officer

Children's brushing habits



81% of parents with a child aged seven and under said they either brush their teeth for them or supervise their brushing. However, **9%** of parents said their child brushes unsupervised

Sugar

Sugar continues to dominate the headlines and the Government recently announced a sugar tax for manufacturers of sugary soft drinks, to come into effect in 2018. Adults are now exposed to the topic of sugar more than ever before but will this encourage them to change their habits?

We asked people how they felt about their current sugar intake. The top answers were:

28% said they were already taking steps to watch or reduce their sugar intake

27% said they were happy with their current sugar intake and have no plans to change

15% said they actively avoid eating sugar

9% said they'd like to reduce their sugar intake and plan to do so soon

8% said they'd like to reduce their sugar intake but aren't sure how

In January 2016, **47%** of adults said they would support the introduction of a tax on sugary soft drinks



Interestingly, the **18-24** year old group are the most likely of all ages who said they'd like to reduce their sugar intake (**30%**)



One in five adults (19%) admit they are addicted to sugar. **Nearly a third (31%)** of **18-24** year olds say they are addicted to sugar

The **55+** age group are most conscientious when it comes to their current sugar consumption, with **54%** saying they already watch their intake or actively avoid sugar



What action should we take?



Only a third of UK adults (34%) think that retailers and food companies do enough to inform them of how much sugar is in food and drinks.

We asked those who didn't think retailers and food companies do enough to inform them of how much sugar is in food and drinks what they would like to see done differently. The top answers were:

75% think there should be clearer labels on food/drink packaging

74% think there should be a reduction in the overall sugar content in foods/drinks

71% think there should be more consistent labels on food/drinks packaging across brands

46% think sugary food/drinks should be removed from near shop tills

38% think advertising of sugary foods/drinks should stop



“There does seem to be a push on sugar awareness and how this affects our health, including its impact on tooth decay, obesity, diabetes, cancer and heart disease. There are many factors to tackle the problem of the UK's sugar consumption, but if we can start encouraging people to be aware of their recommended daily sugar limits, to read and understand food and drink labels, to make healthy choices, and to limit how frequently they have sugar throughout the day, we can do a lot to reduce oral health and overall health problems.

Sugar is currently added to many foods and drinks, and it's not always easy to identify its presence from the labels as manufacturers often use alternative names. These include words like glucose, fructose, sucrose, lactose, maltose, honey, maple syrup, molasses, treacle, and rice and corn syrups. It's best to always make your own meals and snacks from scratch so that you know exactly what's in them, as well as maximising your nutritional intake.”

Henry Clover, Denplan's Chief Dental Officer

The links between oral health and overall health

Increasingly, studies are finding connections between our oral health and our overall health. Links are now recognised between gum disease and more serious conditions including diabetes, strokes, and heart disease. Not only does this support the importance of regular dental check-ups, it also highlights the far-reaching benefits that good oral health can have on your overall wellbeing.

Do people recognise any links between their oral health and overall health?

82%

of adults agree that poor oral health can have a significant impact on your overall general health



75%

of adults agree that signs of serious disease and illnesses can be detected in their mouth by their dentist



“It’s always important to let your dentist know if you have, or if you have had, any serious health conditions. Your dentist can tailor your dental care and recommend an oral health routine to best suit your needs in relation to any conditions you may have. Diabetics, for example, may find they suffer more from oral health issues such as dry mouth, gum disease, and mouth infections – all of which can be managed with the help of your dental practice team.”

Henry Clover, Denplan's Chief Dental Officer

Which health conditions do people think can be linked to poor oral health?

58% think poor oral health can be linked to mouth cancer

27% think it can be linked to heart disease

19% think it can be linked to diabetes

13% think it can be linked to respiratory diseases

7% think it can be linked to strokes

4% think it can be linked to rheumatoid arthritis

3% think it can be linked to low birth weight babies

“Studies are increasingly finding links between oral health and all of the above medical conditions. It’s encouraging that 58% of people know that poor oral health can be linked to an increased risk of mouth cancer, but awareness of the connections with other conditions is low. It’s important that patients who have any of the above conditions are aware of the importance of maintaining their oral health, as well as anyone who may be at risk of developing any of the conditions in the future.”

Henry Clover, Denplan's Chief Dental Officer



Oral health and overall health - how can we manage these?

How do people with existing serious health conditions manage their oral health?

Of all adults who said they'd ever been diagnosed with a serious condition (diabetes, heart disease, stroke, rheumatoid arthritis, respiratory disease or mouth cancer), only a few had thought about how it might affect their oral health:

58% said they didn't do anything as a result of their diagnosis in regards to their oral health

19% looked after their teeth and gums better

10% visited the dentist more regularly

9% spoke to their dentist about how to look after their oral health specifically in relation to their condition

34%

of patients with a serious condition said they'd like their dentist to provide them with help/advice to manage their oral health in relation to their condition

What could health professionals do to raise awareness?

79% of adults think that dentists, GPs and other health professionals should provide more information and raise awareness of the links between oral health and conditions such as mouth cancer, heart disease, strokes, and diabetes

76% of adults think GPs, school nurses and similar health professionals should include dental health as part of their overall health checks (e.g. asking patients when their last dental check-up was).

“Although still in its infancy, some private dental practices are starting to offer additional health checks to patients such as weight monitoring, blood pressure, diabetes checks, and cholesterol levels. This value-added service supports the message of oral health linking to overall health and provides patients with valuable insights into their general wellbeing, especially if they find it more convenient to visit their dentist on a more regular basis than their GP.”

Henry Clover, Denplan's Chief Dental Officer

54%

of adults said they would be interested in having other health checks during a routine dental check-up, such as blood pressure levels, diabetes, weight and cholesterol levels

Interestingly, the **25-34** year old respondents were the most likely to want this service (**61%**), and the **55+** age group were the least likely (**47%**)

The dentist-patient relationship

Patients often have a lot of choice when it comes to selecting their dental practice or dentist, and may not make their decision based purely on location or financial reasons. Dental practices find themselves more than ever in a competitive market and many continually strive to find ways to both attract new patients and retain existing ones. What do patients value in a dental practice and how can dental practices tailor their services?

What is rated as 'important' to patients?

Patients who visit the dentist regularly (at least once every two years) said:

- 1 Trust **(94%)**
- 2 Confidence that the surgery is sterile and hygienic **(93%)**
- 3 Clear explanation of treatments and procedures **(92%)**
- 4 Good customer service **(90%)**
- 5 Convenience of appointment times **(86%)**
- 6 Being seen on time for their appointment **(85%)**
- 7a Clear communication of steps they need to take in between appointments to maintain their oral health **(83%)**
- 7b Reputation/recommendation of the practice **(83%)**
- 8 Convenience of the practice's location **(81%)**
- 9 Value for money **(79%)**
- 10 Quality accreditations/awards **(37%)**

“Although ‘value for money’ is an important factor, it’s interesting to note that trust, hygienic surgeries and clear communication top the list of what’s most important to patients.

Having these kind of insights can help dental practices to tailor their services to patients. For example, knowing that patients value clear explanation of treatments and procedures, dental teams can dedicate time for patients needing treatment and possibly utilise their Treatment Co-ordinator if there is one available at the practice. This in turn will also build trust and rapport.”

Henry Clover, Denplan's Chief Dental Officer



83%

of adults who visit the dentist at least once every two years said they were satisfied with the dental care and treatment they currently receive. Patients on a dental payment plan have the highest levels of satisfaction **(94%)**

Why don't some patients visit the dentist regularly?

Top answers from those who go less often than once every two years:

Fear of the dentist/pain (42%)

I can't afford to go (36%)

I don't go unless I need treatment (24%)

I'm worried they'll find things that need further treatment (21%)

I don't think it's worth the money it costs (16%)

I can't access/find an NHS dentist (15%)



About Denplan

Denplan is the UK's leading dental payment plan specialist, with more than 6,500 member dentists nationwide caring for approximately 1.7 million registered patients.

Established in 1986 by two dentists who pioneered the concept of dental payment plans, Denplan has been at the heart of dental care for nearly 30 years and today the company is owned by Simplyhealth.

Denplan has a wide range of dental plans for adults and children, enabling patients to budget

for their private dental care by spreading the cost through a fixed monthly fee. We support regular attendance and preventive care, reducing the need for clinical intervention and helping patients to maintain healthy teeth and gums for life. For further information visit www.denplan.co.uk

For more oral health tips and advice for consumers, visit www.myteeth.co.uk

About Henry Clover

Denplan's Chief Dental Officer



Henry Clover joined the Professional Services team of Denplan in 1998, having worked as a dentist for 17 years looking after patients' oral health in his own practice. He now holds the position of Chief Dental Officer at Denplan, as well as playing a vital role in Denplan's Leadership Team and is at the forefront of private dentistry liaising with more than 6,500 member dentists.



For interviews with Henry Clover, or Denplan's Managing Director, Steve Gates, please call Denplan's press office on **01962 828 000** or email **pressoffice@denplan.co.uk** for more information.