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Denplan releases new oral health consumer survey

- The pandemic has had a negative impact on one in three sets of teeth in the UK
- 20% of UK adults do not visit the dentist regularly
- 3 in 5 NHS patients would consider paying for private dental care, with over a third of them (36%) not having been open to this in the past
- Only half of UK adults (51%) brush for the recommended two minutes or more

Denplan, part of Simplyhealth, has discovered worrying trends in the nation's oral health as part of its comprehensive [Consumer Oral Health Survey](#)¹ published in a report today.

Denplan, the UK's leading dental payment plan provider, runs a comprehensive annual² consumer survey which 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.

Key headlines on attendance

This year research shows that 20% of UK adults are not visiting dentists regularly (less than every two years), with almost one in three never having had a scale and polish with the hygienist. Fear (31%) and affordability (29%) are still key reasons people don't go, with nearly a third (30%) only visiting the dentist when in pain.

Confidence in surgery hygiene (90%), the dentist ensuring the health of their teeth and gums (92%), and trust (91%) in their dentist continue to be the most important factors to patients when choosing a dentist, with trust and quality of care rated significantly higher by private patients.

“Our research enables us to keep ahead of dental trends, looking at access, oral health routines and habits. While this year does show some similarities from previous years in terms of what patients' value from their practice, there are also significant differences.

¹ Survey data of 5,060 adults conducted by DeltaPoll on behalf of Simplyhealth, undertaken 8-11 October 2021. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (18+).

² The Consumer Oral Health Survey was paused in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Interestingly, offering a range of payment options is up by nearly ten percent in importance in reasons why to choose a dentist since our last survey in 2019. With a significant number of adults not having check-ups as they don’t think it’s worth the money – now is a real opportunity for practices to flag their various payment options,” says Dr Catherine Rutland, Clinical Director at Denplan.

Pandemic impact

With a gap since our 2019 survey, our research has been able to show clear pre-pandemic to post-lockdown behaviours. The COVID-19 pandemic has had negative consequences for more than one in three patients, largely but not exclusively because of postponed or delayed dental appointments.

Further research³ also showed that around a quarter (24%) of UK adults have missed seeing their dentist in person and 10% say their reliance on their dental team has increased.

“The coronavirus pandemic has exposed – and in many cases exacerbated – the issues facing mixed and private dental practices across the UK. Despite nearly two years of practice teams doing tremendous work in meeting patient care needs and carrying out treatments under challenging circumstances, access is still hard. Even more so for NHS patients, who in our research show to be attending less regularly than private patients.

“Looking ahead, financial pressures because of the pandemic, as well as patients being out of the routine of regular attendance will all have an impact. But we are also seeing patients valuing their health more in light of the pandemic, with nearly a third saying they are more likely to visit the dentist as a result. This opens a real opportunity for practices to reach out to these patient groups,” says Dr Catherine Rutland.

Oral health habits

The survey also looked at the nation’s oral health habits with only half of adults (51%) brushing for the recommended two minutes or more. Up to 20% of adults (25-34-year-olds) admit to sharing a toothbrush with another person and around a quarter of adults (23%) don’t floss or clean between their teeth, as it makes their gums bleed or hurt. Nearly one in five (19%) have taken time off work due to dental pain.

Some of the other worries consumers have about their oral health are tooth loss (37%), gum disease (36%) and tooth decay (37%). One in ten of adults are most concerned about how their teeth look in photos. A shocking 23% of UK adults say they don’t show their teeth when they smile, 13% say they have low confidence

³ This data is from an additional online survey data of 2,008 UK adults (18+) conducted by Research without barriers on behalf of [Simplyhealth](#), undertaken 6-8 October 2021.

issues because of their teeth and 8% avoid socialising because of the way their teeth make them feel.

Commenting on these figures, Denplan's Head Dental Officer, Louis Mackenzie said: **"As dental professionals we know the detrimental impact of patients not maintaining a good oral health routine. Our research is sadly showing a ten percent drop, compared to our 2019 survey, in both adults who brush twice a day, but also for the recommended two minutes. Nearly a quarter indicate they don't floss or use interdental brushes, as it makes their gums bleed- a possible warning sign of gingivitis.**

"It's encouraging to see the World Health Organisation has published a global strategy on oral health, helping to flag the issues of the world's most common diseases: tooth decay and gum disease and also the increase of erosive tooth wear. As dental professionals we all play a part in driving this strategy forward."

Read the [full report](#), with more in-depth figures and other topics, such as links between oral health and general health, mouth cancer and children's oral health.

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Notes to Editors:

About Denplan, Part of Simplyhealth:

Denplan, Part of Simplyhealth, is the UK's leading dental payment plan specialist with more than 6,600 member dentists nationwide caring for approximately 1.3 million patients registered to Denplan products.

Denplan, Part of Simplyhealth, also provides a wide range of professional services for its member dentists and their practice teams, including the Denplan Quality Programme and Denplan Excel Certification Programme. Plus regulatory advice, business and marketing consultancy services and networking opportunities.

Dentist enquiries telephone: 0800 169 9962.

For patient enquiries telephone: 0800 401 402

For details of all of our products, visit www.denplan.co.uk

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About Simplyhealth

Since 1872, we've been helping people make the most of life through better everyday health. Our plans make sure individuals, families and employees can easily access in-person and virtual wellbeing services, and afford to stay healthy by claiming costs back on dental treatments, visits to the optician, complementary therapies and much more.

Today we're a leading UK health solutions company, with almost 1000 colleagues serving 2.3 million customers. We don't have shareholders, so we're led by our purpose of improving access to healthcare, for the many, for the long term. We're passionate about using our voice in public health affairs and partnering with charities to reduce health inequality – each year we commit to giving 10% of pre-tax profits to a range of community causes. And we ensure our business takes care of the planet too, achieving Carbon Neutral + status in 2021.

To find out more, visit www.simplyhealth.co.uk