

# Common dental problems

The list given below is for guidance only. You can check your mouth with an [oral self-examination](#) and [contact your dentist](#) for a proper diagnosis. Make sure you tell the dentist about any medical problems and any prescribed drugs that you are taking.

Do you have any of the following problems?

- ✓ [Toothache](#)
- ✓ [Bleeding gums](#)
- ✓ [Loose teeth](#)
- ✓ [Bad breath](#)
- ✓ [Mouth ulcers](#)
- ✓ [Injuries](#)
- ✓ [Discoloured teeth](#)
- ✓ [Dry mouth](#)

## **Toothache:**

*What sort of pain is it? Does it keep you awake at night? Is there swelling as well?*

Pain can have different qualities. Check the list below.

- ✓ *The ache comes only when I eat sweet foods or drinks*

You may have a cavity: you will need to get it checked and treated before it gets any worse.

- ✓ *The ache is a dull continuing nuisance. It feels as if there is some food trapped.*

Food can get stuck in cavities and between teeth. This can cause [bad breath](#) and may make [gum disease](#) worse. The food may be removed by brushing or the use of floss, but the reason for the food getting stuck should also be checked.

- ✓ *The ache comes when I have very cold or hot foods or drinks?*

You may have sensitive teeth due to lack of enamel protecting part of the tooth. This often occurs due to [becoming long in the tooth](#), or to [dental erosion](#) or when [tooth decay](#) is progressing beyond the stage mentioned above. Check out the cause to find out how to stop the problem getting worse. Sometimes your dentist may advise using desensitising toothpastes.

- ✓ *The ache is worse when I lie down; it stops me from sleeping at night, even when I take pain killers; the tooth is very painful to touch; there is some swelling in the area.*

You may be getting an abscess, either around the root of a tooth or in the gum. **An abscess** is a collection of pus containing harmful bacteria. You may be able to help reduce the pain by rinsing with hot salty water, but you need to see a dentist as a matter of urgency to stop the infection from spreading. Avoid taking aspirin to relieve the pain as it can increase bleeding if you then have a tooth out, but paracetamol, taken according to instructions on the packet, is safe and may help to reduce pain.

## **Bleeding gums:**

- ✓ *Gums start to bleed, especially after toothbrushing or when eating hard foods such as apples?*

You may have gingivitis, an early form of [gum disease](#). Possibly you are not removing all of the [plaque](#) when you brush. The bacteria in the remaining plaque makes poisons that irritate gums and cause them to bleed. This problem is more common during pregnancy. When you visit your dentist, a member of the dental team can advise on how to clean more effectively.

## **Loose teeth:**

- ✓ *Your own teeth are getting loose or shift position in the mouth?*

You probably have a more advanced form of [gum disease](#) called 'periodontitis'. This problem is more common in older people, as they get '[long in the tooth](#)'. You may be at risk of getting [an abscess](#), so arrange for a check-up soon.

## **Bad breath:**

- ✓ *Problems up close? Do your friends keep their distance?*

Sometimes breath can smell due to food eaten recently (e.g. garlic). Ask a close friend to describe the type of smell.

Bad breath can often be due to problems in the mouth. These can include:

- Food particles remaining around the teeth and gums then starts to rot. This is more likely if you have a cavity (tooth decay) or 'pockets' around the teeth due to [gum disease](#). The dentist can help identify the problem. You may also need advice with cleaning more effectively, including flossing and using interdental brushes. You may also find it helpful to clean your tongue.
- Bad breath can also be due to problems with nasal sinuses or the lungs, or if you smoke, or there can be other reasons connected with your general health.
- If your dentist cannot find a reason for the bad breath, you should check with your doctor.

## **Mouth ulcers**

- ✓ *Are your ulcers painful or painless?*

All ulcers should be checked out for a diagnosis the first time they appear.

**Any ulcer** that lasts more than 3 weeks will need checking.

### Painful ulcers:

- The commonest types are small, painful and last for about 14 days. They reappear when people are tired or 'run down'. A few people have painful, larger ulcers - up to the size of a small coin, which may follow a similar pattern. Stress, certain foods, lack of vitamins and iron, hormonal changes and gut problems have all been linked as possible causes.
- Some painful ulcers persist as they are due to irritation, e.g. a sharp filling may cause an ulcer on the tongue, dentures may rub too hard on the gums. The dentist can find the cause and correct it.

### Painless ulcers:

- If you notice a painless ulcer on the lips, gums or elsewhere in the mouth that does not heal within 3 weeks, you should report this to your dentist immediately. (Cross-refer to oral cancer)

## **Injuries**

- ✓ *Have you had an accident and damaged a tooth? Are any teeth broken, knocked out or is there bleeding that won't stop?*

People of all ages can have accidents. If a tooth is broken or knocked out, save it and keep it gently wrapped in clean gauze, soaked in milk. Arrange to see a dentist as soon as possible, ideally within the next six hours. Tell the receptionist about the accident when you phone. It is particularly important for children aged 7-12 years to see the dentist as quickly as possible as possibilities for repair are then much better.

## **Discoloured teeth:**

- ✓ *Are your teeth getting darker? Is it all the teeth, or just one or two of them?*

No-one has natural white teeth. Healthy teeth are ivory in colour. However they can appear whiter against a dark skin or bright lipstick

- ✓ *Is just one tooth suddenly getting darker than all the others?*

Single teeth can get darker as a result of an accident. Check with your dentist, who may be able to help you.

- ✓ *Are all your teeth getting darker?*

This can be the result of:

- Staining from food & drink, cigarettes, tea, lipstick or some medicines. In this case, a professional cleaning should improve matters.
- Aging: teeth get darker as you get older. If this worries you, ask your dentist about tooth bleaching, or possibly veneers. A veneer is a thin layer of tooth-coloured material put onto the front of a tooth to make it look better. If you are worried about the colour of your teeth, see a dentist before you try a DIY bleaching kit.

## **Dry mouth:**

*Dry mouth can affect people of all ages and occurs for a variety of reasons.*

- ✓ *Do you breathe through your mouth, say at night?*
- ✓ *Are you anxious, nervous or depressed?*
- ✓ *Are you taking a prescription drug? Dry mouth may be one of the side-effects.*
- ✓ *Are you dehydrated - for instance due to diarrhoea and vomiting?*
- ✓ *Do you have a medical problem, such as diabetes, Parkinson's Disease or rheumatoid arthritis?*

If you have a dry mouth, it is very important to look after your teeth and gums as you have less saliva to protect your mouth. As a result

- Dental decay can progress more rapidly,
- You can be more prone to gum disease and mouth ulcers
- Other mouth infections are also more common.

*How can you help yourself?*

- Have frequent sips of water and other sugar-free and alcohol-free drinks
- Make sure your teeth and gums are kept clean
- Use a fluoride toothpaste and fluoride alcohol-free mouthwash.
- Cut down on the frequency of sugary snacks and drinks, including at bedtimes.
- A sugar-free chewing gum may be helpful.
- Avoid sucking acidic fruit sweets to moisten the mouth
- Visit your dentist at regular intervals for checks.
- Your dentist or doctor may sometimes recommend a saliva substitute

For more information.....