

Dental recall

Understanding NICE guidance – information for people the public

Factsheet

May 2004

How often should I see the dentist?

You are probably used to being told by your dentist that you need a check up every six months. But new guidelines from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence suggest that dentists should match check-up appointments more closely to each individual's needs.

Depending on your teeth, your health and your lifestyle, your dentist may suggest you return in six months or a different interval. This may vary as your need to see a dentist changes at different times in your life. For example, children need to see a dentist more often because problems with the teeth can develop more quickly than in adults.

At each check up your dentist will judge your risk of developing future problems. They may suggest seeing you in three months time, particularly if you are having a course of treatment for a problem with your teeth. If your teeth and mouth are very healthy you may be given an appointment for two years time (one year is the maximum gap if you are under 18). Most people will have a check up somewhere in between.

If you have any problems between check-ups such as bleeding gums or pain, contact your dentist to make an earlier appointment. In an emergency outside office hours, contact NHS Direct (0845 46 47) for the Emergency Dental Service.

You should see your dentist if you develop a health problem (such as cardiovascular disease) or make any changes in your life or diet which may affect your teeth (for example, taking medication that contains sugar over a long period of time).

About clinical guidelines

Clinical guidelines are produced by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) and aim to improve care and treatment in the NHS in England and Wales. This leaflet describes guidelines called Dental Recall: recall interval between routine dental examinations issued in September 2004. For details on how to order a copy of the guideline, see Contacts on page 4.

Dentists and other experts examined the evidence and found that a set six month interval between routine dental check ups is not suitable for everyone. They have

issued these guidelines to help dentists judge the right interval for each individual.

This leaflet and the accompanying poster explain what these guidelines mean to the public. They cover routine dental check-ups only, not appointments with a dentist or hygienist for treatment such as fillings, having teeth out or having your teeth cleaned (called a 'scale and polish').

What your dentist will do at a check up

At each check up your dentist will assess how healthy your teeth and gums are, and weigh up your risk of future problems by looking at:

- Your general health – some conditions may increase your risk of developing dental disease while others can make it more difficult for you to look after your teeth
- Your history – past decay or gum disease makes future problems more likely.
- The condition of your teeth and gums - for early signs of wear, decay or disease.
- The inside lining of your mouth - for early signs of mouth cancer.
- Your saliva flow – a good flow keeps your mouth and teeth healthy.
- Your use of tobacco and alcohol – heavy smoking and drinking puts you at greater risk of mouth cancer and smoking increases the risk of gum disease.
- Your diet – The frequent consumption of sugar-sweetened foods, and drinks (especially fizzy drinks and fruit squash) can cause tooth decay. Tooth erosion (where the surface of the teeth is worn away) can be caused by excessive consumption of acid drinks including “diet” fizzy drinks and fruit juice.
- Your fluoride intake – using fluoride toothpaste, or living in a water fluoridated area helps your teeth resist decay.
- How well you clean your teeth – if a lot of plaque (a film of bacteria) stays on your teeth after brushing you are at greater risk of tooth decay and gum disease.

Based on what he or she finds, your dentist will suggest a date for your next check-up, and discuss this with you.

You should always be told in advance the cost of a check-up or any other dental treatment. If you have to change or cancel an appointment, do so in advance or you may be charged a fee.

What you can do at home

There is a lot you can do to keep your teeth and gums healthy and reduce your risk of future problems, and the need for such frequent check-ups:

Diet: reduce the consumption and especially the frequency of intake of drinks, confectionery and foods with sugars.

Toothbrushing: clean the teeth thoroughly twice every day with a fluoride toothpaste.

Dental attendance: have dental check-ups when recommended by your dentist

Finding a dentist

To register with an NHS dentist, contact NHS Direct (see below). For private dentists try the yellow pages telephone book. Ask friends, family or neighbours if they can recommend a local dentist.

Dentists can choose whether they accept NHS, private patients or both. You can get free NHS dental treatment if:

When the treatment starts you are:

- aged under 18
- aged 18 and in full-time education
- pregnant, or have had a baby in the 12 months before treatment starts
- an NHS in-patient and the treatment is carried out by the hospital dentist
- an NHS Hospital Dental Service out-patient*
- a Community Dental Service patient*

* There may be a charge for dentures and bridges.

When the treatment starts or when the charge is made:

- you are getting, or your partner gets:
 - Income Support

Information for the public factsheet - draft for second consultation

- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (Incapacity Benefit or Disability Living Allowance do not count as they are not income-related)
- Pension Credit Guarantee Credit
- you are entitled to, or named on, a valid NHS tax credit exemption certificate
- you are named on a valid NHS certificate for full help with health costs (HC2)

You will need to ask a dentist if they accept NHS patients.

The rules about NHS registration are set to change on 1 April 2005.

Contacts

NHS Direct: Tel: 0845 46 47

Website: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

For information on NHS dentists

British Dental Health Foundation

Eastlands Court

St Peter's Road

Rugby

Warwickshire CV21 3QP

Tel: 01788 546365

www.dentalhealth.org.uk

For information on looking after your teeth

National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE)

MidCity Place

71 High Holborn

London

WC1V 6NA

www.nice.org.uk

The full and short versions of the guideline are on the website

To order copies of this leaflet [*details to be added on publication*]

