

HIV & your Mouth

Taking good care of your mouth and teeth

Taking care of your mouth is the first step to good nutrition and overall health.

The condition of your mouth – teeth, gums, tongue and throat - can significantly affect your physical and emotional health, including comfort, appearance, self-image, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, diet and speech, and further impact upon other health conditions.

For good oral health

- Thoroughly brush your teeth at least twice a day or after meals with a 'soft' toothbrush. Hard bristles damage your gums and wear away the enamel on your teeth.
- Use toothpaste that contains fluoride.
- Clean between your teeth every day with interdental brushes or floss.
- After eating a meal rinse your mouth with water if you're unable to brush.
- Drink plenty of water (2-3 litres per day) between meals.
- Avoid high sugar content foods and acidic foods (soft drinks, vinegar, soy sauce).
- Smoking can lead to dry gums, poor condition of your teeth, bad breath (halitosis), ulcers and in some cases increase the risk for mouth cancer.
- Visit your dentist twice a year for a clean and check-up.



HIV and oral health

"HIV can present some unique oral problems and therefore disclosure to a dentist you can trust, can improve your health care."

"Floss, brush, rinse. Limit sugar, drink water and stimulate saliva."

Oral issues for people living with HIV

Dry mouth (Xerostomia) – is due to a lack of saliva. Causes include HIV, HIV drugs, other medications (eg. diuretics, anti-depressants) and recreational drugs (e.g. amphetamines and ecstasy).

Taste changes – can occur as a common side effect from some HIV drugs and other medications or due to a fungal infection.

Teeth clenching and grinding (Bruxism) – can be caused by some HIV drugs which affect sleep, mood or anxiety levels. It causes teeth and gums to become painful, sore and sensitive, and result in marked wear of the teeth. Some antidepressant medications and recreational drugs such as amphetamines (ecstasy, speed etc.) may also contribute to teeth grinding and other dental problems.

Tooth discolouration – is an alteration in the appearance of the teeth, caused by staining from tobacco smoke (nicotine), caffeine and tannin containing foods (such as tea, coffee, cola, chocolate and berries). Your dentist will be able to help.

Oral Infections

Angular cheilitis

A mixed fungal and bacterial infection, which shows up as inflamed red patches and cracks in the corners of the mouth. It can be treated with antifungal creams such as Daktarin. Often there is also bacterial infection in the area, which may require antibiotics. Applying vaseline or cocoa butter to the area once the infection has been treated may help keep the skin moisturised and prevent further cracking.

Gingivitis and periodontitis

Gum infections characterised by swelling and bleeding of the gums when brushing or flossing. Your dentist can help.

Mouth ulcers

Red, inflamed open sores or blisters that make eating certain foods uncomfortable. They are most commonly caused by an overactive immune system following immune reconstitution from HIV medications.

Oral candidiasis (Thrush)

A fungal infection of the mouth and/or throat. Most commonly there are small or large white or bright red patches on the roof of the mouth, tongue, inside cheeks, and the mouth may feel furry, sore or itchy.

These fungal organisms live in most human mouths. A weakened immune system can make it easier for this fungus to grow.

Tips for infections

A good mouth wash is ½ a teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda in a glass of water. This restores a more natural balance in your mouth, lowers the growth of bacteria that can contribute to bad breath (halitosis) and mouth ulcers.

Visit your dentist

- Visit your dentist twice a year for a scale clean and check-up.
- If you can't afford a dentist you can attend a Community Oral Health Clinic.
- Check with your Local Health District for locations in your area.



Dentists and disclosure

There is no legal requirement to disclose your HIV status to any health care worker (including dentists). To ensure you get the best possible dental care, it is advisable to provide as much information as possible about your health.

You can ring and ask if the dental clinic has worked with people living with HIV and/or is familiar with HIV oral complications as a way to make the topic of disclosure easier.

For more information phone 02 9206 2177 or 1800 245 677 (freecall) or visit www.positivelife.org.au

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The voice of all people living with HIV

Positive Life NSW