How Often Should You Have a Dental Check-Up? | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/dental-check-ups/

Details:

Many people are advised to have a dental check-up and clean about every six months, although the right interval depends on your own risk of decay and gum disease. Your dentist at Core Dental may suggest visits more or less often after examining you. A full check-up usually takes between 30 minutes and an hour. Regular visits help us find problems such as decay and gum disease early, often before they cause pain, and include a screen for signs of oral cancer.

Why do you need to see the dentist regularly?

Many dental conditions, including tooth decay and gum disease, are preventable, yet they often cannot be seen or felt until they are well advanced. Even if you brush and floss every day, some areas of the mouth are easy to miss. Once a cavity has formed, you will need a filling or sometimes more complex dental work. Gum disease, likewise, needs professional attention.

At Core Dental we recommend regular visits so that small concerns are found while they are still simple to manage. Even people who look after their teeth very carefully at home still benefit from seeing a dentist and a hygienist on a regular basis.

How does a regular clean protect your teeth and gums?

Plaque is the sticky film that builds up on teeth every day. If it is not removed, it can lead to tooth decay and to inflammation of the gums, known as gum disease. In the early stages you may notice swelling, bleeding or soreness. If gum disease progresses, teeth can eventually become loose and may be lost.

Regular professional cleans help reduce plaque and tartar build-up and let us keep an eye on areas that are prone to decay, so that they can be managed before they progress. Your dentist will advise how often you need a clean based on your own mouth.

What is involved in a dental check-up and clean?

During a check-up your dentist will examine your teeth, gums, mouth and the muscles of your face. We may also take X-rays where they are clinically appropriate. X-rays show things that cannot be seen with the naked eye, such as decay between the teeth, bone loss, impacted or misplaced teeth, and swellings or cysts in the jawbone.

A professional clean with one of our hygienists removes plaque and stain, and scales the teeth to remove calculus, also called tartar. Calculus is hardened plaque that often builds up behind the lower front teeth and in other areas, and it cannot be removed with a toothbrush. Having it removed regularly supports the health of the tissues that hold your teeth in place.

What does your dentist look for during an oral cancer screen?

Oral cancer is a serious condition and it is sometimes diagnosed late. As part of a routine check-up, your dentist examines the soft and hard tissues of the mouth, looking for changes that might need further investigation, so that any concern can be dealt with early. Regular check-ups give your dentist more opportunities to notice changes. Your dentist will also feel your head, neck and lymph nodes for lumps or swellings.

If we find anything unusual, we will explain what we have seen and refer you to an appropriate doctor or specialist for further assessment. You can read more in our article on mouth cancer .

Why might some people need to come in more often?

Some people have an increased risk of dental problems and may be advised to attend more often than every six months. This can include people with a history of gum disease or frequent decay, people who smoke, people with diabetes, and people who are pregnant. Others with a low risk may be comfortable with longer gaps. We tailor the interval to you rather than assume that everyone needs the same schedule.

What should you do between visits?

Good habits at home matter just as much as the visit itself. Brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, clean between your teeth daily, limit sugary and acidic snacks and drinks, and book an appointment promptly if you notice bleeding gums, a toothache, a lump, or an ulcer that has not healed within three weeks.

What does a check-up cost at Core Dental?

Your fees depend on what is needed, such as X-rays and the type of clean. We quote before treatment starts so there are no surprises, and HICAPS lets you claim from your health fund on the spot if you are covered. Our guide on how much a dental check-up costs in Melbourne explains this in more detail.

How is the right interval decided for one person?

The page above gives the general advice. This section is about how a dentist arrives at a figure for you specifically, because that process is more useful to understand than any single number.

The approach now supported internationally is a risk-based one. A Cochrane systematic review on recall intervals quotes the guidance issued in England and Wales by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, under which the interval between oral health reviews "should be determined specifically for each patient and tailored to meet his or her needs, on the basis of an assessment of disease levels and risk of or from dental disease."

Two phrases in that sentence carry the weight. "Disease levels" is what is happening in your mouth now — active decay, bleeding gums, pocketing, existing restorations that need watching. "Risk of or from dental disease" is forward-looking, and covers both how likely you are to develop a problem and how much harm it would do if you did. A medical condition, a medication that dries the mouth, or a complicated restorative history can raise the second even when the first looks settled.

The review also describes the interval as something revisited rather than fixed. The risk-based process it sets out involves considering the relevant risk and protective factors, agreeing an interval with the patient, and then reviewing whether that interval is still appropriate at the following check-up, adjusting or maintaining it accordingly. An interval is a working assumption, not a permanent setting, and it can move in either direction as circumstances change.

In the trial underlying the review, the recommendation for adults was that "the recall interval range for adults should vary from 3 to 24 months, based on risk." That is the span the approach contemplates for adults. It is UK guidance rather than Australian, and it applied to adults only.

Source: Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, Recall intervals for oral health in primary care patients, pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov (accessed 3 November 2026).

How strong is the evidence for the six-month default?

Weaker than most people assume, and it is better that you hear that from a dentist than discover it elsewhere.

The Cochrane review states that patients "have been encouraged to attend for routine dental check-ups at regular 6-month intervals, irrespective of their risk of developing dental disease", and that "there is, however, a weak evidence-base underpinning this recommendation." It adds that the distribution of dental disease across a population, taken together with differences in individual risk, "casts doubt on the appropriateness of assigning a 'fixed and universal' recall interval (e.g. six months) for all patients."

None of that is an argument for attending less. The review is equally clear that longer intervals "may also compromise oral health by reducing the frequency of the delivery of preventive advice and delaying the diagnosis of dental disease, thereby resulting in more extensive and costly care." The problem with a universal figure is that it is wrong in both directions at once: too long for some people and more often than necessary for others.

Why does any of this matter at a population level?

Because the condition being screened for is not rare.

The National Health and Medical Research Council describes tooth decay as "one of the most common health problems in Australia", and notes that "it can cause pain, difficulty eating and sleeping, and may make people feel unhappy about their appearance." Those are the everyday consequences, and they are the reason regular review exists at all.

The NHMRC also records real improvement over time. It states that "in Australia, dental health has improved since water fluoridation began in the 1950s", and that "compared to their parents' generation, Australians born after 1970 (when the majority of water fluoridation programs commenced in Australia) have about half the level of tooth decay" — a comparison NHMRC draws from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data.

Prevention at that scale is a combination rather than a single measure. The NHMRC's own framing is that "along with a combination of healthy diet, good oral hygiene, appropriate use of fluoridated toothpaste and regular dental check-ups, water fluoridation is an effective public health measure to prevent tooth decay." The check-up is one component of four, which is a fair description of how much of the work happens between appointments.

Source: National Health and Medical Research Council, Health effects of water fluoridation, nhmrc.gov.au (accessed 3 November 2026).

Frequently asked questions

Is every six months really necessary?

Six months is a common recommendation, but it is not right for everyone. Your dentist considers your history of decay, gum health, habits and general health. Some people are advised to attend more often,

and some can safely go longer. We will tell you what suits you.

How long does a check-up take?

A full check-up usually takes between 30 minutes and an hour. The time depends on whether you also have X-rays or a professional clean with a hygienist, and on what your dentist finds. Please allow enough time when you book.

Do I still need a check-up if my teeth feel fine?

Yes. Decay and early gum disease often cause no pain at first. A check-up helps find these changes early, when treatment is usually simpler. It also includes a look at the soft tissues of your mouth, head and neck.

Are dental X-rays always taken at a check-up?

No. X-rays are taken when your dentist believes they are clinically appropriate for you, for example to look between teeth or at the bone around them. We explain why they are recommended and what they show before taking them.

Should I see a hygienist as well as a dentist?

A hygienist focuses on cleaning, scaling and helping you keep your gums healthy, while a dentist diagnoses and treats problems. Many people benefit from both. Read our article on seeing a hygienist as well as a dentist .

What range of intervals does risk-based guidance contemplate for adults?

In the UK trial examined by the Cochrane review on recall intervals, the recommendation was that the recall interval range for adults should vary from 3 to 24 months, based on risk. That span is UK guidance applying to adults, not Australian guidance, and the interval appropriate for you is for your own dentist to assess.

What does a dentist weigh up when setting an interval?

The criterion quoted in the Cochrane review, from NICE guidance in England and Wales, is an assessment of "disease levels and risk of or from dental disease". That covers what is active in your mouth now, how likely you are to develop a problem, and how much harm it would cause if you did. The review also describes the interval being agreed with the patient and then reviewed at the following check-up, so it can be adjusted as things change.

How common is tooth decay in Australia?

The National Health and Medical Research Council describes tooth decay as one of the most common health problems in Australia, and notes it can cause pain, difficulty eating and sleeping, and can make people unhappy about their appearance.

Has Australian dental health improved?

The NHMRC states that dental health in Australia has improved since water fluoridation began in the 1950s, and that Australians born after 1970 have about half the level of tooth decay of their parents' generation, a comparison it draws from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data.

Related services and further reading

Dental check-up

No gap dental check-up

Dental hygiene

What does a hygiene appointment involve?

How much does a dental check-up cost in Melbourne?

Everything you may need to know about mouth cancer

How do I know if I need a filling?

Should I see a hygienist as well as my dentist?

5 tips for a healthier smile

How can we help?

If you are due for a check-up and clean, call us on 13 13 16 or book online at the Core Dental clinic closest to you. Tell us about any concerns when you book and we will allow the right amount of time. If you are new to us, see what to expect at your first Core Dental appointment or read about our general dentistry services.

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans, with HICAPS on-site claiming.

Call 13 13 16 or book online.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online via coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm (Bayside Saturday 8.30am to 1.30pm), Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

How often should I have a check-up and clean?

Many people are advised to have a check-up and clean about every six months. Your Core Dental dentist will set the right interval for you after examining your teeth and gums and considering your risk of decay and gum disease.

How long is a full dental check-up at Core Dental?

A full check-up at Core Dental usually takes between 30 minutes and an hour. It covers your teeth, gums, mouth and surrounding structures, and may include X-rays and a clean with a hygienist when appropriate.

Why do dentists recommend regular visits even without pain?

Tooth decay and gum disease are often painless until they are advanced. Regular Core Dental visits let our team find problems early, monitor areas prone to decay, remove plaque and tartar, and screen for signs of oral cancer.

What is tartar and why does a hygienist remove it?

Tartar, also called calculus, is hardened plaque that builds up on teeth, often behind the lower front teeth. A toothbrush cannot remove it, so our Core Dental hygienists scale it off to support healthy gums.

Does a Core Dental check-up include an oral cancer screen?

Yes. During a routine check-up our dentists look at the soft and hard tissues of the mouth, and feel the head, neck and lymph nodes, for changes that may need referral and further investigation.

Why might X-rays be taken at a check-up?

Your Core Dental dentist may take X-rays where clinically appropriate to find decay between teeth, bone loss, impacted or misplaced teeth, and swellings or cysts in the jawbone that cannot be seen by eye.

How do I book a check-up at Core Dental?

Call 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. We are open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings across our nine clinics, and HICAPS claiming is available on site.