Dental Health in the COVID-19 World | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/dental-health-in-the-covid-19-world/

Details:

We published this article on 26 August 2020. It looked at how the stress and disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic were affecting oral health, in particular gum disease and teeth grinding (bruxism). It is historical information, kept for context. It is not current public-health, infection-control or appointment advice, so please follow current government health guidance and the advice of your clinic. The oral health points about stress, gum health and jaw pain remain relevant to many people today.

What was this article about?

In 2020 many people found their routines turned upside down. At Core Dental we saw that stress and disruption to daily habits could show up in the mouth, in two main ways: worsening gum health and increased grinding and clenching of the teeth. We wrote this article so our patients understood the connection and knew what tools were available.

Why did gum health come into focus during the pandemic?

Gum disease is often a quiet condition, and many people do not recognise the signs or the importance of gum health. In 2020 we noted reports of gum disease progressing more quickly in people whose dental care had been delayed, with gum and bone shrinking as a result. Gum disease also has effects that extend beyond the mouth.

Stress can make it harder to look after your mouth. Anxiety and stress often go together with a poorer diet, neglected habits such as brushing and cleaning between the teeth, and more alcohol or smoking. Some patients told us that disrupted routines meant they were snacking more and cleaning less. Together these habits can worsen gum disease and other oral health problems.

If your gums bleed, look red or swollen, or you notice a bad taste or breath that does not go away, book a check-up. Our guide to keeping your gums healthy and our guide to gum disease treatment explain what to look for and what care involves.

What are bruxism and temporomandibular joint disorder?

Grinding or clenching your teeth is called bruxism. Temporomandibular joint disorder (TMD) is a problem with the jaw joint that can cause soreness and pain in the joint, frequent headaches, and popping or clicking of the jaw. You may be grinding or clenching if you notice:

Sensitive teeth or a sore jaw when you wake up

Headaches

Disrupted sleep

Ear aches

Bitten inner cheeks

Wear on your teeth, or broken or chipped teeth or fillings

Research has linked stress and anxiety with the development and progression of both bruxism and TMD. In 2020 our team saw more patients with these problems. Some had acute jaw pain, and others had split or fractured teeth that needed emergency extraction or root canal treatment. Many of them told us their stress levels had increased because of the pandemic.

What can your dentist do about teeth grinding?

One of the tools available is a night-time splint, custom made for your teeth by your dentist. A splint is designed to protect your natural teeth from clenching and grinding and to ease muscle tension and painful joint symptoms. Whether a splint suits you depends on an examination and your history, and a splint does not remove the cause of stress. Our guides on dental splints , managing grinding and jaw pain explain more.

What if cost is a concern?

A major effect of the pandemic for many households was financial difficulty through lost jobs, reduced hours or pay cuts. If cost is a worry, please talk to us. We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans so cost does not have to stand between you and caring for your smile. Payright plans run for amounts up to $20,000 over 3 to 30 months with fortnightly repayments, subject to Payright's eligibility and approval. Terms were published as at September 2026 and can change, so please confirm the current terms with us. See our dental payment plans page.

Oral health sits inside general health, and the sources say how

The lasting point from a period when routine care was disrupted is not about any one illness. It is that the published advice treats the mouth as part of general health rather than beside it — and it is specific about the connections.

The broadest statement. The Victorian Department of Health: "Looking after your teeth and gums is important for the health of your mouth. A healthy mouth allows you to smile, eat and speak which helps your general health, mental wellbeing and ability socialise with others. Poor oral health has been linked heart disease, diabetes, respiratory illness, cancer and stroke."

That is the Department's own sentence, and we are quoting it as written rather than strengthening it: poor oral health "has been linked" to those conditions.

The shared risk factors, which is the more actionable version. "The lifestyle factors that lead to dental disease (regularly consuming sugary food and drinks, smoking and regularly drinking alcohol) are very similar to those that lead to diabetes, obesity, heart disease, stroke and some cancers. So, it is important to live a healthy lifestyle and to take care of your oral health by brushing your teeth twice a day and flossing once a day."

The same three habits drive both. Which means dental advice and general health advice are not competing for your attention — they point at the same changes.

On gum disease specifically, the Department states a two-way relationship and its limits. "If gum disease is not under control it can impact your health and have negative effects on heart health, and worsen diabetes. Keeping your gums clean and healthy, helps keep your heart and other systems healthy too."

And for diabetes it goes further, carefully. "It is important to look after your oral health and control your blood glucose levels to prevent gum disease. Treating gum disease may also help to improve blood glucose levels in people living with diabetes. In general, people with blood glucose levels in the target range respond very well to dental treatment."

May also help — the Department's own hedge, which we leave in place. It also notes the direction that is better established: "Gum disease is more common and more severe in people with suboptimal blood glucose levels. This is because they generally have lower resistance to infection and reduced healing capacity."

One connection that runs the other way. "The first signs and symptoms of diabetes can occur in the mouth, so paying attention to your oral health and speaking to your doctor or dental practitioner about any changes can also lead to earlier diagnosis and treatment."

And the blunt one about nutrition. "Missing teeth can make it difficult to chew food. This might make it difficult to get the nutrients your body needs which can affect your health."

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Teeth and mouth care, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 25 July 2025); Dental anxiety and phobia, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025); Gum disease, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 August 2025); Diabetes and oral health, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 29 October 2025); Dentures, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 4 August 2026). All accessed 6 November 2026.

Three conditions where your dentist needs to know

If oral health sits inside general health, the practical consequence is that your medical history belongs in the dental chair. The published advice names why.

The general principle. "When you go for a dental check-up, your dentist should ask questions about your general health and medications. Many health conditions have an effect on your oral health and vice versa." And: "Some medicines can affect your mouth or need to be taken into consideration before dental treatment."

Condition one: diabetes. The Department lists five common oral problems in people with diabetes — "periodontal (gum) disease", "tooth decay", "oral thrush fungal infections, such as thrush (also known as candidiasis)", "taste disturbances" and "dry mouth due to low saliva levels" — and explains the mechanism: complications "can increase in severity when a person with diabetes has poor control of their blood glucose levels. This is because they have lowered resistance to infection and may not heal as easily." Its visit interval for this group is specific: "Visit your dentist every 6 to 12 months for advice about how to keep your teeth and gums healthy."

It also corrects a belief worth naming: "Many people think that gum disease is an unavoidable part of diabetes, but this is not true. Good oral hygiene and well-controlled blood glucose levels greatly reduce your risk."

Condition two: anything causing a dry mouth, including medication. "A dry mouth is a symptom of an underlying problem, rather than a condition in itself", and "about 10% of the general population and 25% of older people experience dry mouth". On the commonest cause: "about 600 drugs and medications, both legal and illegal, are known to cause dry mouth. These include antihistamines, high blood pressure medications, sedatives, decongestants, analgesics (pain relief), antidepressants and illegal drugs such as cocaine."

Why it matters dentally: people with dry mouth "are more likely to get tooth decay and are more prone to get decay along the gum line (tooth root surface)". And the Department's first listed treatment is a conversation with the prescriber, who "may be able to change the dose or prescribe something different".

Condition three: smoking or vaping. "People who smoke or vape have a higher risk of gum problems, tooth loss, complications after tooth removal and surgery in the mouth, and developing mouth cancer. They are more likely to get infections and do not heal as well as non-smokers/non-vapers." And the good news: "people who quit smoking or vaping have the same risk of developing gum disease and responding to gum treatment as non-smokers". If you vape, "make sure to tell your dentist this".

What the daily routine comes down to across all of it. "Enjoying a nutritious low-sugar diet, daily toothbrushing and regular dental visits are key ways to keep your mouth feeling good and working well."

And the one sentence to take away about timing. "Having no pain does not always mean that your teeth and mouth are healthy."

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 3 June 2026); Diabetes and oral health, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 29 October 2025); Dry mouth, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 9 September 2025); Effects of smoking and vaping on oral health, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 24 September 2025); Teeth and mouth care, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 25 July 2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Is this article current COVID-19 guidance?

No. We published it on 26 August 2020 and keep it for historical context only. For current public-health, infection-control or appointment guidance, follow your state health authority and check with your clinic.

Can stress really affect my teeth and gums?

Stress can contribute to teeth grinding and clenching and can coincide with habits such as snacking more and cleaning less, which may affect gum health. A dental examination can tell you whether either applies to you.

What are the signs that I might be grinding my teeth?

Common signs include a sore jaw, headaches, sensitive teeth on waking, disrupted sleep, ear aches, bitten inner cheeks, worn teeth, and chipped or broken teeth or fillings. These signs can have other causes, so see your dentist for an assessment.

What is a night splint?

A night splint is a custom-made guard made by your dentist to fit your teeth. It helps protect natural teeth from grinding and clenching and can ease muscle tension and joint symptoms. Your dentist will advise whether it is suitable for you.

Do you have payment options if I am under financial pressure?

Yes. We offer interest-free payment plans through Payright, subject to eligibility and approval, and we quote before treatment starts. Please ask your clinic for the current terms.

Is oral health really connected to general health?

The Victorian Department of Health states it directly: "Poor oral health has been linked heart disease, diabetes, respiratory illness, cancer and stroke." We quote that as written rather than strengthening it.

What is the practical version of that connection?

Shared risk factors. "The lifestyle factors that lead to dental disease (regularly consuming sugary food and drinks, smoking and regularly drinking alcohol) are very similar to those that lead to diabetes, obesity, heart disease, stroke and some cancers."

Does gum disease affect the rest of my health?

The Department's statement is: "If gum disease is not under control it can impact your health and have negative effects on heart health, and worsen diabetes. Keeping your gums clean and healthy, helps keep your heart and other systems healthy too."

Does treating my gums improve my diabetes?

The Department's wording is careful: "Treating gum disease may also help to improve blood glucose levels in people living with diabetes. In general, people with blood glucose levels in the target range respond very well to dental treatment."

Can a dentist spot signs of diabetes?

Sometimes. "The first signs and symptoms of diabetes can occur in the mouth, so paying attention to your oral health and speaking to your doctor or dental practitioner about any changes can also lead to earlier diagnosis and treatment."

Why am I asked about my general health and medications?

"Many health conditions have an effect on your oral health and vice versa", and "some medicines can affect your mouth or need to be taken into consideration before dental treatment".

Could my medication be affecting my teeth?

Very possibly, through dryness. "About 600 drugs and medications, both legal and illegal, are known to cause dry mouth", and people with dry mouth "are more likely to get tooth decay and are more prone to get decay along the gum line (tooth root surface)".

How common is dry mouth?

"About 10% of the general population and 25% of older people experience dry mouth." The Department frames it as "a symptom of an underlying problem, rather than a condition in itself".

I have diabetes. How often should I be seen?

"Visit your dentist every 6 to 12 months for advice about how to keep your teeth and gums healthy." And the lever is glucose control: "Good oral hygiene and well-controlled blood glucose levels greatly reduce your risk."

Does smoking or vaping change my dental risk?

Yes. People who smoke or vape "have a higher risk of gum problems, tooth loss, complications after tooth removal and surgery in the mouth, and developing mouth cancer". And if you quit, you have "the same risk of developing gum disease and responding to gum treatment as non-smokers".

Does missing a tooth affect more than my appearance?

It can. "Missing teeth can make it difficult to chew food. This might make it difficult to get the nutrients your body needs which can affect your health."

What is the short version of good oral health?

The Department's own summary: "Enjoying a nutritious low-sugar diet, daily toothbrushing and regular dental visits are key ways to keep your mouth feeling good and working well."

Related services and further reading

Neglecting your oral health during COVID

COVID-19 information from Core Dental

Why it is safe and essential to continue visiting the dentist during COVID-19

How can I stop grinding my teeth?

What are dental splints?

How to keep your gums healthy

Causes of TMJ pain and how it is treated

Dental payment plans

Emergency dentistry

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, with Monday to Friday hours to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

Interest-free payment plans, HICAPS on-site claiming and bulk billing for eligible children under the Child Dental Benefits Schedule.

Invisalign Blue Diamond provider, as stated on coredental.com.au.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Online booking	Book via coredental.com.au
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

The contents of this article are general in nature and may not apply to your circumstances. Every person is different, so please see a qualified, AHPRA-registered dental practitioner for advice that suits you.

When did Core Dental publish the article on dental health during COVID-19?

We published this Core Dental article on 26 August 2020. It is historical information kept for context and is not current public-health, infection-control or appointment guidance.

What oral health effects did Core Dental see during the pandemic?

In 2020 our Core Dental team saw more patients with jaw pain, grinding and clenching, including some with split or fractured teeth. We also noted reports of gum disease progressing in people who had delayed dental care.

What is bruxism?

Bruxism is the clenching or grinding of the teeth. It can lead to a sore jaw, headaches, sensitive teeth, disrupted sleep, and worn, chipped or broken teeth or fillings. Core Dental dentists can assess whether you are grinding and discuss options.

What is temporomandibular joint disorder?

Temporomandibular joint disorder, or TMD, is a problem with the jaw joint. It can cause soreness and pain in the joint, frequent headaches and popping or clicking of the jaw. A Core Dental dentist can examine your jaw and advise.

How can a dentist help with teeth grinding?

A Core Dental dentist can make a custom night-time splint for your teeth. A splint is designed to protect your natural teeth from grinding and ease muscle tension and joint symptoms. Suitability depends on an examination.

Can I pay for dental treatment over time at Core Dental?

Yes. We offer interest-free Payright plans for amounts up to $20,000 over 3 to 30 months, subject to eligibility and approval. Terms were published as at September 2026, so confirm current terms with your Core Dental clinic.

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

Call Core Dental on 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au. We are open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings, and we reserve emergency appointments each day where possible.