Neglecting Your Oral Health During COVID | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/neglecting-your-oral-health-during-covid/

Details:

If you put off your oral care, tooth decay and gum disease can develop or progress, and both can lead to pain and infection. This article looks back at the COVID-19 period, when many people delayed dental visits. It is historical and is not current public-health or infection-control advice. The basics have not changed: brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, clean between your teeth, limit sugar, and call your dentist if you have pain. At Core Dental we encourage you to book promptly if something feels wrong.

Why is this article kept on our site?

During the COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdowns, many people found it harder to look after their teeth or to visit a dentist. This article records the general oral health advice we shared during that time. It is kept for context only. It should not be treated as current public-health, infection-control or appointment guidance, so please follow the current advice of government health authorities and your dental practice.

How can neglecting your oral care lead to tooth decay?

Neglected oral care can lead to tooth decay. Decay can be silent, with no symptoms at all, or it can cause some sensitivity, or it can be painful enough to keep you awake at night. How it feels does not always match how serious it is, which is why regular examinations matter.

If decay is left untreated it can reach the nerve at the centre of the tooth. This puts you at risk of pain and infection, and treatment is often more involved once the nerve is affected. Seeing your dentist early, when a cavity is small, usually means simpler treatment.

How does neglect affect your gums?

The health of your teeth is important, but so is the health of the gums and bone that support them. When food debris and plaque collect along the gumline and are not cleaned away, the gums can become inflamed over time. Without treatment this inflammation can lead to irreversible loss of the bone around the teeth.

A good oral care routine therefore protects both your teeth and your gums. If your gums bleed, look swollen or feel tender, mention it to your dentist so that it can be checked.

How do you keep your teeth healthy during stressful times?

The advice for caring for your teeth does not change, whatever is happening in the world. Some general tips include:

Brush twice a day, in the morning and at night, with fluoride toothpaste.

Clean between your teeth daily with floss or interdental brushes to help prevent decay and gum problems between the teeth.

Eat a healthy, balanced diet, limit sugar and try to reduce snacking during the day.

Drink water through the day, particularly after sweet or acidic foods and drinks.

Please remember that your routine at home works well alongside regular professional check-ups and cleans, which help your dentist spot problems before they cause symptoms.

Why do some people grind their teeth or have jaw pain when stressed?

Periods of stress are often linked with teeth grinding, clenching and jaw pain. During the pandemic, increased grinding and jaw pain were commonly reported. If you already have a splint from your dentist, wearing it as directed can help protect your teeth. If you do not have a splint and you have jaw aches, headaches or sore facial muscles, talk to your dentist about your options. Your dentist can examine your bite and jaw and advise whether a splint or other management suits you.

When should you call a dentist about pain?

If you have any oral pain or discomfort, please call your dentist rather than waiting. You may need urgent treatment, and treating a problem before it progresses can help avoid complications. Call 000 immediately for uncontrollable bleeding, difficulty breathing or swallowing, a serious facial injury or other life-threatening symptoms. For severe toothache or facial swelling without these signs, contact your Core Dental clinic as soon as you can. We reserve emergency appointments where possible, so please call us on 13 13 16 and describe your symptoms.

How should you plan care if you have delayed a visit?

If you have put off a check-up, a good first step is to tell us about any symptoms, how long you have had them and what you would like to achieve. Bring relevant medical information and a list of your current medicines. Your dentist can examine your teeth, gums, bite and surrounding tissues, take imaging when it is clinically appropriate, and explain which options are suitable.

Ask what the recommended approach is intended to achieve, whether there are reasonable alternatives, what aftercare involves and what risks or limitations apply. A written treatment plan lets you compare stages, appointments and payment arrangements before you decide. At Core Dental we quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans, with terms that apply.

Further detail from Core Dental

The following points are drawn from Core Dental's own published material on this topic. They are included here for completeness, and anything that applies to your own treatment should be confirmed with your clinician.

Despite the challenging and difficult times we find ourselves in during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to ensure that our oral health isn't neglected. Given that most of us are now spending more time at home, this should give us motivation to perfect our daily oral care routines. Failing to do so can unfortunately lead to rapid progression of dental disease. Any swelling in the mouth is urgent and requires immediate attention from a dentist.

If a swelling is left untreated, the infection can spread to other spaces in your head and neck, potentially leading to a life-threatening emergency that requires hospitalisation.

Restoring the routine: the parts that matter most

If a daily routine slipped, the useful thing is not a general exhortation but the short list of specifics that do the most work. The published guidance is detailed enough to rebuild from.

Brushing, with the detail attached. "Clean your teeth twice a day; in the morning and before bed." Use "a toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles and a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste". Technique: "Gently brush teeth and along the gum line in small circles, making sure to brush each tooth on the front, back, and chewing surfaces."

And the step most often skipped at the end. "After brushing, spit out the fluoride toothpaste - do not swallow it, and do not rinse with water. This allows the fluoride more time to strengthen your teeth."

Cleaning between teeth, with the figure that makes the case. "It is important to clean between teeth where a toothbrush can't reach. Products such as floss and interdental brushes can remove plaque from between your teeth." Skip it, and "up to a third of each tooth doesn't get cleaned". For gum health the Department asks for it daily: "Clean between teeth daily with dental floss, interdental brushes, or another tool recommended by an oral health professional."

Diet, where frequency is the variable rather than quantity. "The more frequently you eat or drink sugary things, the more often the bacteria produce acid." Hence "avoid sugary snacks between meals. If you're going to have something sweet, try to have it at mealtimes", and "be conscious of hidden sugars in snacks, cereals and other packaged products".

Two small levers from the same page: "Have a piece of cheese after eating sweet or acidic foods as dairy foods assist in repairing damage by decay-causing bacteria", and "choose fresh fruit over dried fruit, as dried fruit can stick on your teeth and feed the bacteria that cause tooth decay".

Drinks. "Fluoridated tap water is the best drink for oral health." The limit list is broader than sugar: "soft drinks (including sugar-free/diet and regular), sports drinks, cordials and fruit juices". And after anything acidic, "wait at least 30 minutes after the acid exposure before brushing your teeth".

Hydration, because it affects saliva. "Staying well hydrated as this improves your saliva - remember that dehydration can reduce the amount of saliva you make so drink 6-8 glasses of fluids per day, mostly tap water." The Department also notes that "high intake of caffeine found in coffee, tea, chocolate and cola drinks can reduce fluid levels in the body and also reduce saliva".

Why saliva is worth protecting. It "washes sugar out of your mouth and into your stomach, stops acid from causing damage, fights bacteria and can repair the early stages of tooth decay by repairing tooth mineral". Decay happens when "the amount of acid from the bacteria on your teeth outweighs the protective effect of your saliva".

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Teeth and mouth care, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 25 July 2025); Tooth decay, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 28 June 2025); Gum disease, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 August 2025); Dental erosion, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

Two things that get worse under stress

Periods of disruption bring two specific dental problems that are easy to miss because neither feels like a dental problem. Both are in the published advice, and both are worth naming.

One: grinding and clenching. The Victorian Department of Health: "Teeth grinding can be a result of stress. For example, some people grind their teeth when they are angry, concentrating hard or feeling anxious."

It is common and usually unnoticed: "About half of the population does it from time to time. Around 5% of the population grind their teeth regularly", and "usually, a person doesn't realise that they grind their teeth in their sleep. The partner who shares their bed (and hears the grinding noises at night) is often

the first to notice the problem."

The symptoms you could notice yourself : "headache, jaw joint and/or ear pain"; "aching teeth, particularly just after waking up"; "aching and/or stiffness of the face and temples just after waking up"; "aching or stiffness in the jaws while chewing, particularly during breakfast"; "clenching the jaw when angry, anxious or concentrating"; "teeth that are sensitive to hot, cold or sweetness"; "cracked or chipped tooth"; "tooth indentations on the tongue".

What it can do : "cracked tooth"; "more wear and tear on the teeth than is normal"; "broken teeth or broken restorations (for example, fillings)"; "strain on the jaw joint (temporomandibular joint)"; "pain or limited movement in the jaw joint"; "sore jaw muscles"; "teeth being more sensitive to hot and cold things".

What helps , and it is mostly not dental: "stress management therapy"; "relaxation techniques"; "cognitive behaviour therapy"; "hypnotherapy"; "good sleep hygiene"; "regular exercise." A splint is on the list too, with the caveat that must travel with it: "In most cases, a bite splint will only help with the symptoms and will not stop you from grinding altogether."

Other risk factors worth reviewing: "Stress and anxiety"; "Alcohol"; "Smoking"; "Caffeine"; "Snoring"; "Obstructive Sleep Apnoea". healthdirect, the Australian Government's health information service, adds for jaw problems that "you may notice your symptoms are worse when you are stressed or anxious".

Two: a dry mouth, which is often a side effect of something else. The Department: "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".

Its causes include medications — "about 600 drugs and medications ... are known to cause dry mouth", among them "sedatives" and "antidepressants" — as well as dehydration, mouth breathing "in the case of a persistently stuffy nose or blocked sinuses", and alcohol and caffeine.

Why it matters. "Because they are lacking the protection of saliva, 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 names dismissing it as a myth: "dry mouth increases the risk of tooth decay and oral infections, so it's important to get support if you notice it."

What to do about it. "If you have a constant dry mouth, consult your dentist or doctor to find the cause." Where a medication is responsible, "the doctor who prescribed it may be able to change the dose or prescribe something different".

And one timeframe for the gums, if brushing lapsed. "Do not stop brushing if your gums are red, bleeding or puffy. Try to keep brushing with a soft toothbrush." Then: "If your gums do not improve or if they keep bleeding after four weeks, see your oral health professional." The good news is that "gingivitis can be reversed".

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Teeth grinding, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 17 October 2025); Dry mouth, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 9 September 2025); Diabetes and oral health, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 29 October 2025); Gum disease, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 August 2025); healthdirect (Australian Government), Temporomandibular joint dysfunction, healthdirect.gov.au (the page states it was last reviewed November 2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Can tooth decay go away on its own?

Established decay does not repair itself, although very early enamel changes may be managed with good home care and fluoride. Ask your dentist to check any spots or sensitivity, because a small cavity is usually simpler to treat than a large one.

Is it safe to leave a toothache until it settles?

It is not a good idea. Pain can be a sign of decay reaching the nerve or of infection, and it may get worse. Call your dentist, who can advise whether you need urgent care, and use 000 for life-threatening symptoms.

Do I need to change how I clean my teeth during stressful times?

No. The same basics apply at all times: brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, clean between your teeth daily and limit sugar. If stress leads you to grind your teeth, tell your dentist.

Why is gum health as important as tooth health?

Your gums and the bone beneath them hold your teeth in place. Ongoing inflammation can cause bone loss that cannot be reversed, which can lead to loose teeth. Looking after your gums protects your teeth as well.

Is this article current COVID-19 advice?

No. It is a historical article kept for context. Please follow the current guidance of government health authorities and your dental practice for any infection-control or appointment questions.

What is the single most overlooked step in brushing?

Not rinsing afterwards. "After brushing, spit out the fluoride toothpaste - do not swallow it, and do not rinse with water. This allows the fluoride more time to strengthen your teeth."

How much does skipping flossing cost me?

"Up to a third of each tooth doesn't get cleaned" without floss or an interdental brush. For gum health, the Department asks you to "clean between teeth daily".

Is it the amount of sugar or how often?

How often. "The more frequently you eat or drink sugary things, the more often the bacteria produce acid", which is why the advice is to keep sweet things to mealtimes.

Are there quick wins on diet?

Two. "Have a piece of cheese after eating sweet or acidic foods as dairy foods assist in repairing damage by decay-causing bacteria", and "choose fresh fruit over dried fruit, as dried fruit can stick on your teeth".

What should I drink?

"Fluoridated tap water is the best drink for oral health." Limit "soft drinks (including sugar-free/diet and regular), sports drinks, cordials and fruit juices", and after anything acidic, "wait at least 30 minutes ... before brushing your teeth".

Does hydration matter for teeth?

Through saliva. "Drink 6-8 glasses of fluids per day, mostly tap water", because "dehydration can reduce the amount of saliva you make". The Department also notes caffeine "can reduce fluid levels in the body and also reduce saliva".

Can stress affect my teeth?

Yes, through grinding. "Teeth grinding can be a result of stress. For example, some people grind their teeth when they are angry, concentrating hard or feeling anxious." healthdirect adds that jaw symptoms "are worse when you are stressed or anxious".

How would I know if I am grinding?

Symptoms you could notice yourself include "aching teeth, particularly just after waking up"; "aching and/or stiffness of the face and temples just after waking up"; "aching or stiffness in the jaws while chewing, particularly during breakfast"; "clenching the jaw when angry, anxious or concentrating"; and "tooth indentations on the tongue".

What helps with grinding?

Mostly non-dental measures: "stress management therapy"; "relaxation techniques"; "cognitive behaviour therapy"; "hypnotherapy"; "good sleep hygiene"; "regular exercise." A bite splint helps symptoms only: "In most cases, a bite splint will only help with the symptoms and will not stop you from grinding altogether."

Could my mouth being dry be a side effect?

Often. "About 600 drugs and medications, both legal and illegal, are known to cause dry mouth", including sedatives and antidepressants. A dry mouth is "a symptom of an underlying problem, rather than a condition in itself".

Is a dry mouth actually harmful?

Yes, and the Department names dismissing it as a myth: "dry mouth increases the risk of tooth decay and oral infections, so it's important to get support if you notice it." Its advice is to "consult your dentist or doctor to find the cause".

My gums bleed since I got out of the habit. What should I do?

Keep brushing with a soft brush and give it four weeks. "If your gums do not improve or if they keep bleeding after four weeks, see your oral health professional." The good news is that "gingivitis can be reversed".

Related services and further reading

Dental health in the COVID-19 world

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

Dental check-ups

Emergency dentistry

How to keep your gums healthy

Ways to manage grinding teeth

Healthy snacks to help prevent tooth decay

5 tips for a healthier smile

How can we help?

If you have delayed a visit, have a toothache or have noticed bleeding gums, our team can examine you and explain your options at any of our nine practices. Call 13 13 16 or book online. You can also read about our emergency dentistry service.

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.

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

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online through 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.

What can happen if I leave tooth decay untreated?

Untreated decay can reach the nerve at the centre of the tooth, which puts you at risk of pain and infection. Core Dental dentists examine your teeth for early decay so we can treat small cavities before they become more involved.

Can tooth decay be painless?

Yes. Decay can cause no symptoms, mild sensitivity, or pain strong enough to keep you awake. Because pain is not a reliable guide, Core Dental recommends regular examinations so our dentists can find decay early.

How can neglected oral care affect my gums?

Food debris and plaque left along the gumline can inflame the gums over time and lead to irreversible loss of the bone around the teeth. Core Dental dentists and hygienists can check your gums and help you protect them.

What daily routine do Core Dental dentists recommend?

We recommend brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, cleaning between your teeth daily, eating a balanced diet and limiting sugar and snacking. Regular check-ups and cleans with our team support the routine you follow at home.

Why might my jaw ache or teeth grind more when I am stressed?

Stress is often linked with teeth grinding, clenching and jaw pain. If you have a splint, wear it as your dentist directed. If you do not, ask a Core Dental dentist to examine your jaw and discuss options.

Should I call a dentist if I have mouth pain?

Yes. Oral pain or discomfort may need urgent treatment before it progresses. Call Core Dental on 13 13 16 and describe your symptoms. For life-threatening symptoms, such as trouble breathing or swallowing, call 000.

Is this Core Dental article current COVID-19 guidance?

No. It is a historical article that records advice shared during the COVID-19 period. For current infection-control or appointment information, follow government health authorities and contact your Core Dental clinic.

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

Call 13 13 16 or book online at coredental.com.au. We have nine clinics across Melbourne, open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings. Tell our team how long it has been so we can plan your visit.