

Are You Receiving Oral Health Care?

Timely and regular visits to your dentist are important to ensure early detection of any new dental decay, gum disease or other problems. Your dentist will advise you on the best recall times for your particular oral health needs. This may range from less than once every year to every 2 or 3 years.

Regular visits are also important for those who wear false teeth. These visits may be less frequent than those with teeth. However, too often those who wear false teeth, feel they no longer need dental checkups.

Whether you have your natural teeth or not, you should always be alert to changes in your teeth, gums and mouth. Any signs of swelling, bleeding, or ulcers that do not heal indicate that you should visit your dentist immediately.

Where can I get dental care?

Anyone who is over 18 years of age and holds a Health Care or Pensioner Concession Card is eligible for emergency and general dental care at The Royal Dental Hospital or a Community Health Centre, for a small fee.

Additional services are provided at the Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne to patients who meet the eligibility criteria (i.e. concession cardholders). These services include, for example: treatment of nerves of teeth, advanced gum disorders, crowns, bridges, implants, partial or full dentures, lumps, ulcers, spots, and oral

and Maxillofacial Surgery.

Dentures can be provided at the Dental Hospital or through Community Health Centres. In addition, the Victorian Denture Scheme enables eligible people to receive their dentures from local dentists or prosthetists participating in the scheme at subsidised fees.

Waiting list

There is a waiting list for non-emergency care and all specialist services (including dentures) under the Victorian Denture Scheme.

However, within the public sector, **emergencies** have to be seen within 24 hours.

If you find it difficult to get dental treatment through the public system or you want some services the public system cannot provide, contact the private system.

Qualification of dental practitioners providing services through the public sector

Only fully qualified dentists provide dental examinations and treatment in the public sector.

It is also possible to be treated by other types of fully qualified dental professionals, such as the Dental Hygienist, who works mainly in the private sector, and the Advanced Dental Technician who can provide specific services under the Victorian Denture Scheme.

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Effective communication with oral health professionals.

While oral health professionals have the dental expertise you need, you can also take an active role in getting the best oral health services. Accessing good services consists of two steps:

a) Getting information:

- Never be afraid to ask the dentist/dental professional about proposed treatments.
- Do not feel embarrassed to ask for explanations to be rephrased.
- Ask for an interpreter in advance, if you think you may not understand explanations or directions. Oral health providers have the legal obligation to provide access to this service. However, this may involve extra cost to you.
- It is important that you are made aware of your treatment options. However, they may not all be available through the public system.
- Ask about any additional costs.
- You can also ask for written information that you can review at home.

Never be embarrassed. Always give your oral health provider a chance to understand your concerns and show you that he/she cares.

b) Giving information:

In general, when we go to the dentist they tend to talk about teeth, gums and dentures. However, this is not their only concern as there

are several systemic diseases that may affect oral health or oral treatment. As dentists need information to make proper diagnoses and to provide effective treatments, they might spend some time reviewing your medical history.

Give the dentist as much information as you can about your general health.

How do I go about making a complaint?

Just as you deserve respect, so do the oral health professionals with whom you interact. No matter how frustrating a situation becomes, you are more likely to get what you need if you remain positive and polite.

If problems arise:

- First, discuss the problem with the professional involved. Many situations can be easily solved at this level. If you are still not satisfied, ask to see the dentist's supervisor.
- If the problem occurs in the public sector (i.e. Dental Hospital or a Community Health Centre), it may be that the solution of the problem is not in the hand of the dentist (i.e. cost, treatments available, waiting lists). In such cases, you may want to contact your local health manager.
- If the problem occurs in private practice, the only institution that may mediate for you is the Victorian Branch of the Australian Dental Association or the Dental Practice Board of Victoria.