

NEWS RELEASE

BRITISH DENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION



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Is Your Smile At Risk?

National Smile Month 20 May to 20 June 2012

Why are we apparently so reluctant to look after ourselves? As a nation we spend just £5 each week on health² and it's getting worse. Between 2005 and 2010, weekly household spend in the UK on health has declined by 25 per cent.

Our reluctance to invest in our health is particularly evident in relation to our oral health with millions of people continuing to run the risk of tooth decay, fillings, tooth loss and even worse. Despite major improvements in the nation's oral health over the past few decades, the UK's leading oral health charity is hoping to remind everyone during National Smile Month that putting your smile at risk is just not worth it.

A perfect smile is one of the symbols of today's image obsessed culture. All the evidence suggests that celebrities are right to make their gleaming smiles a priority and fundamental to the success of their careers, relationships, personality and attraction.

A recent UK survey³ indicated that a 'smile' topped a poll of the most important physical features for attraction. The poll indicated that a smile was rated highly by 56 per cent of respondents, closely followed by faces (53 per cent) and eyes (51 per cent). Dress sense, body shape, hair and height were also measured, with the latter bringing up the rear on 25 per cent.

However, despite the importance of their smiles, the oral health habits of millions of people leave much to be desired. Government statistics⁴ show that a quarter of all adults have not visited a dentist in the past two years and a similar number only brush their teeth once a day. Little wonder then that the UK has some alarming oral health statistics:

- Over four-fifths of the population have at least one filling.
- 6 per cent of adults have no natural teeth.
- 19 per cent of adults have full or partial dentures.
- 31 per cent of adults have tooth decay.
- Three in every ten adults suffer from regular dental pain.

In fact, just ten per cent of adults are classed as having excellent oral health and many people are left counting the cost of their problems in ways that are often taken for granted. Around a fifth of adults (21 per cent) have struggled to eat as a result of poor oral health, seven per cent struggle to speak and around one in six adults (15 per cent) even have trouble smiling.

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Poor oral health doesn't just cause problems inside the mouth. General health is also at risk too, as studies continue to associate poor oral health with serious health problems such as diabetes, heart disease, strokes, pneumonia, premature babies and other major conditions.

Problems with oral health in the UK starts from an early age with around a third of all children starting school already showing signs of tooth decay. This figure remains unchanged at the age of 12 and through into adulthood. Thankfully, with a good oral health routine, most of the problems with our teeth, and wider health conditions, are preventable.

To help educate and remind the public each year about their oral health, the British Dental Health Foundation organises National Smile Month. The campaign is supported by thousands of dental and health professionals and aims to encourage everyone to follow three simple rules essential for great oral health:

- Brush your teeth for two minutes twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste;
- Cut down on how often you have sugary foods and drinks;
- Visit your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend.

Chief Executive of the British Dental Health Foundation, Dr Nigel Carter, says: "Around half of people in the UK are unhappy with their teeth and smiles. For many their problems are self-inflicted and a result of years of not investing in their oral health. It seems remarkable that so many people neglect one of the most important parts of their bodies and are putting their smiles at risk.

"Skipping brushing twice a day causes serious problems for oral health. Data shows that people who brush just once a day increases the incidence of tooth decay by a third, compared to people who brush twice a day. The incidence of tooth decay also reduces by 40 per cent for people who visit their dentist at least once a year, compared to those who visit the dentist less frequently.

"National Smile Month is the nation's annual reminder about the importance of oral health and it is a great time to review and improve how you take care of your mouth and teeth. Thankfully, more people are visiting the dentist. More than 30 million patients have been seen by an NHS dentist in the past two years – an increase of one million from 2006. However, without constant reminders we know that bad habits soon return⁵.

"National Smile Month is also about having fun and this year we want to make everyone smile with our very own 'Smiley'. It's guaranteed to make everyone smile – at school, home or in the workplace. It's also a great reminder about how to take care of your teeth.

"We are hoping that the nation will become one huge 'Smileathon' throughout May and June and together we can celebrate the importance of our smiles."

To find out more about National Smile Month 2012, including ordering your 'Smileys', visit www.smilemonth.org

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Editor's notes

1. The British Dental Health Foundation is the UK's leading oral health charity, with a 40-year track record of providing public information and influencing government policy. It maintains a free consumer advice service, an impartial and objective product accreditation scheme, publishes and distributes a wide range of literature for the profession and consumers, and runs National Smile Month each May, to promote greater awareness of the benefits of better oral health. For more information visit www.dentalhealth.org and www.smilemonth.org
 2. Family Spending Survey, Office of National Statistics, 29 November 2011: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-spending/family-spending/family-spending-2011-edition/index.html
 3. British Dental Health Foundation Survey, May 2011.
 4. Adult Dental Health Survey for England, Wales and Northern Ireland 2009, published March 2011: www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/primary-care/dentistry/adult-dental-health-survey-2009--summary-report-and-thematic-series
 5. NHS Information Centre, 2011.
 6. National Smile Month was established in 1977 and is the UK's biggest annual oral health campaign. The campaign is sponsored by headline sponsors Wrigley, Listerine, Oral-B and Steradent. The campaign is also being supported by Aldi, Argos, Bupa, Dencover, Denplan, Lloyds Pharmacy (official pharmacy partner), Save Water Save Money, SleepRight, Smile-on and Wilkinson. The campaign promotes three key messages for great oral health:
 - Brush your teeth for two minutes twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste;
 - Cut down on how often you have sugary foods and drinks;
 - Visit your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend.
- Other ways to improve oral health include:
- Clean between your teeth with interdental brushes or floss at least once a day;
 - Use a mouthwash as part of your regular oral health routine;
 - Chew sugar-free gum in between meals to help protect your teeth throughout the day;
 - If you wear dentures, clean them twice a day.