

20 March 2019

How many teeth do you have? How many will you keep for life? Embargoed until 01.00am 20th March

An increasing number of Australians are retaining their teeth throughout their life. Most have the capacity to have at least 28 teeth and keep them for life. So today, 20 March World Oral Health Day, the Australian Dental Association (ADA) is calling on all Australians to reflect on how well they are looking after their oral health and whether they will retain their teeth for life.

“Many people attend the dentist with their teeth in a poor state and think there is nothing they can do. But it’s never too late to take that first step. With a national ageing population, maintaining good oral health has never been so important with people needing to keep their teeth longer as they continue to live longer. Australians should not consider tooth loss to be a natural part of getting older,” is the message from ADA President, Dr Carmelo Bonanno.

But having more teeth brings great risks of disease. “Adults are keeping more of their teeth but as a result rates of gum disease are rising, and the risk increases with age” added Dr Bonanno. “Poor oral hygiene contributes to all stages of gum disease and if left untreated, severe gum disease can result in tooth loss.”

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare¹, Australian adults have an average of 4.5 missing teeth and around 61% of people aged 75 or over have moderate or severe periodontitis.

Last year on World Oral Health Day, the ADA in collaboration with the Australian Health Policy Collaboration, launched Australia’s *Oral Health Tracker* which sets targets for a reduction in the prevalence of these conditions.

World Oral Health Day is an initiative of the FDI World Dental Federation, with the 2019 theme *Say Ahh...Act on Mouth Health*, encouraging people to seek treatment and become proactive in caring for their oral health. With an expanding ageing population and knowledge that poor childhood oral health is the strongest predictor of further dental disease in adulthood, the ADA is reminding Australians that it is never too late to take that first step by going for a check-up with your dentist.

The ADA is encouraging all Australians to act and take charge of their own oral health.

“Poor oral health in childhood is the greatest predictor for dental disease in adulthood, showing the importance of commencing good oral health habits at an early age. Young children copy the actions of their parents, so it’s important that parents set a good example,” added Dr Bonanno.

The ADA recommends that the best way for Australians to keep their teeth is to practise good oral hygiene routines, maintain a diet low in sugar, decrease lifestyle risk factors such as tobacco use and alcohol consumption, and regularly visit their dentist.

To view Australia’s *Oral Health Tracker* www.ada.org.au/oralhealthtracker

For pro tip video guides on flossing and brushing, visit www.ada.org.au/Your-Dental-Health/Oral-Health-Video-Resources

Interviews available with: Dr Carmelo Bonanno, ADA President

-  www.facebook.com/AustralianDentalAssociation
-  www.facebook.com/HealthyTeethAustralia
-  [@Aus_Dental](https://twitter.com/Aus_Dental)

¹<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dental-oral-health/oral-health-and-dental-care-in-australia/contents/introduction>