

ALL your DENTAL questions ANSWERED

For many of us, a visit to the dentist is a nerve-wracking experience. And once you are sitting in the dentist's chair, all the questions you wanted to ask disappear or seem too trivial to ask. Alice Haine asks six of Dubai's leading dental experts on your behalf.

Q I haven't had a check-up for three years – is that a problem?

"Yes, definitely," says Dr Vaidehi Ranganath, specialist dentist-endodontist and conservative dentist at Welcare Ambulatory Care Centre in Dubai. "Dental diseases develop slowly and are painless for several months and people with dental anxiety tend to put off a visit for two to three years.

"Plaque, a thin layer that forms on the teeth every day, turns hard if it is not brushed away and can only be removed by a dental professional. If it is not removed for three years, the plaque, which contains bacteria, damages the teeth and other areas of the body such as the heart and lungs.

"Regular check-ups can also help prevent oral cancer and diabetes as the mouth is the first area to show some signs of these diseases. So a routine check-up will save a lot of damage to the whole body."

Q Which toothbrush does the best job – electric or manual?

"Definitely electric, it takes the error out of brushing and keeps your gums much healthier," says

Dr Michael Apa, a facial aesthetic dentist at Dr Michael's Clinic, Dubai. Ultimately though, it's not the toothbrush that is important, but the brushing itself. Dr Tamim Tulimat, specialist oral surgeon and a family and cosmetic dentist at Luxe Dental Clinic in Dubai explains, "According to the Academy of General Dentistry, the best toothbrush that you can buy is the one that you will actually use. It's really that simple."

Q Do teeth whitening toothpastes really work?

"Yes, but it takes time and continued use to really start noticing a difference in the shade of your teeth," says Dr Tulimat. "Most toothpaste companies recommend that you use their toothpaste continually for six months in order to see whiter teeth. However, in certain cases, some whitening toothpastes cause teeth sensitivity."

But Dr Jaco Smith, general family dentist and managing partner of The Dental Studio in Jumeirah, Dubai, believes whitening toothpastes are only effective for removing stains. "They are more abrasive and therefore remove visible stains better, but chemically

are not strong enough to initiate the whitening process," he explains.

Q Why have I got bad breath?

"Infrequent or improper brushing and flossing allows bits of food that are stuck between the teeth to decay inside the mouth. Poor oral hygiene eventually will lead to periodontal (gum) disease, which can also cause bad breath," says Dr Tulimat. It can also be caused by either a cavity or gum disease, respiratory tract infections, or a dry mouth, caused by taking certain prescription medicines or salivary gland problems. "For an external source, eating garlic and onions, drinking coffee, tea and red wine, or smoking and chewing tobacco will contribute. And illnesses such as diabetes, liver disease, lung disease and sinus disease can be a factor in foul smelling breath," he adds.

Q Are old silver fillings safe?

"Yes," says Dr Ranganath. "The latest regulations from the Food and Drug Administration suggest it is safe for adults and children over six. Research indicates that the quantity of mercury released from

amalgam fillings is minimal and hence may not cause diseases like multiple sclerosis or mercury poisoning."

However, depending on the quality of silver, it may need to be checked periodically. "Once silver fillings start to break down, they release metal compound into your mouth," says Dr Smith. "It's best to have them polished smooth from time to time and replace the ones that are worn down."





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Q Can false teeth fall out easily?

"If they don't fit, yes. But a proper-fitting denture is held in with retention," says Dr Apa. For those having nightmares about seeing their dentures fly out of their mouth comedy style, Dr Smith explains why this scenario might indeed happen. "Do keep in mind that dentures are retained by implants or mechanically by suction to the gum tissue and friction on the bone

crest," he says. "Implant retention is very stable but often we see the mechanical retention fail due to recession of the bone ridge, weight loss or other related health issues that impact on the stability of the jawbone."

Q Is it safe to bleach my teeth?

"Although some sensitivity is expected within the first 24 to 48 hours, to my knowledge nothing

detrimental has been documented and microscopic research shows no changes to the tooth surface with use of a 10 to 15 per cent bleaching solution," says Dr Roudabeh Ghaffari, senior clinician at Dubai's Drs. Nicolas & Asp, and former clinical professor at Tufts University USA. "There is no literature that we have come across showing any structural changes or irreversible damage to the tooth structure whatsoever," he adds.

Q My teeth have always been crooked, is it too late to get braces as an adult?

"No, it's never too late to perfect your smile," says Dr Tulimat. "Most people want a great smile, and adults know that it can make a great difference in their personal, and professional lives. Those who have had it done say the payoff is worth the temporary inconvenience and expense of braces."

Q Are sensitive teeth caused by tooth decay?

"Tooth sensitivity is tooth discomfort after eating hot or cold foods or liquids or even breathing cold air. There are multiple reasons for tooth sensitivity but decay is one of the more common reasons," reveals Dr Smith.

Q My children brush their teeth once a day – is that enough to prevent fillings?

"No, the minimum time to brush teeth should be two minutes," says Dr Tulimat, "and at least two to three times a day. Parents should also take their children to the dentist regularly, beginning with the eruption of the first tooth. Then, the dentist can recommend a specific programme of brushing, flossing, and other treatments for parents to supervise and teach to their children. These home treatments, when added to regular dental visits and a balanced diet, will help give your child a lifetime of healthy habits."

Dr Leila Hariri, Family Dentist at Jumeirah Beach Dental Centre in Dubai, has another tip for parents. She says: "It's very important that nothing else is put in the mouth, except water, after the last brush of the day." And remember to change your child's toothbrush every three to four months.

Q My mother has been diagnosed with trench mouth. What is it?

"Trench mouth is an acute and painful infection of the gums due to an imbalance of bacteria. The term 'trench mouth' began in World War One, when soldiers began to suffer from the condition because of poor oral hygiene," explains Dr Hariri. Symptoms usually include fever and multiple ulcers in the mouth.

Dr Ranganath adds, "People under high stress can develop this disease within a few days. Immediate treatment needs to be given to prevent it spreading to the jaw and neck area."

Q Is chewing gum good for your teeth?

"Yes," says Dr Tulimat. "First, it mechanically cleans the surfaces of your teeth as you chew. Second, and possibly the most beneficial, it promotes the flow of saliva which is a very important part of fighting tooth decay."

The experts recommend choosing gum that contains Xylitol due to its protective elements for the teeth. But Dr Ranganath warns, "Those with artificial crowns and large fillings and people undergoing orthodontic treatment can be at a risk of loosening their crowns and fillings."

Q Why have some of my teeth gone black?

There are a number of causes, including plaque that has not been brushed away from the neck of the tooth for several months, medications such as iron tonics or herbal supplements, undergoing chemotherapy for cancer, cavities, and trauma to the tooth. Dr Ranganath explains, "An injury to

the front tooth many years ago can slowly make the tooth get darker as the nerve inside loses its vitality. Frequent intake of coffee, tea, and colas can also cause staining of the front teeth, and smoking causes severe staining."

Q Will smoking give me mouth cancer?

"Yes, smokers are six times more likely than non-smokers to develop mouth cancer," says Dr Tulimat.

Q I've chipped my front tooth – will it have to be replaced?

"A small chip can be repaired by composite, more commonly known as bonding material," says Dr Ghaffari. "This material can get stained or fractured over time in which case it can be replaced easily."

Q How long do crowns and veneers actually last?

"The average life for a crown or veneer is usually ten to 15 years," says Dr Ghaffari, who points out



that regular check-ups are key to ensuring a crown or veneer lasts as long as possible. "By having good oral hygiene, the possibility of plaque and thus bacterial accumulation decreases. But forces such as clenching and grinding can have a direct effect on the life of a crown and veneers as well, causing early fracture."

Q Why do I have so many fillings?

"Poor oral hygiene, poor nutrition – particularly excessive consumption of acidic foods – or a low saliva production and weak enamel can all result in you requiring a large number of fillings," says Dr Hariri.

Q Do dummies or thumb-sucking make teeth stick out?

They can, says Dr Smith. "The suction action activates the tongue or finger to thrust forward and up which will lead to your teeth to be pushed forward and the dental arch to be narrowed." Ensure that you choose a dummy that is approved by an orthodontist, such as Nuk.

Q What is the best option to replace some teeth, an implant or a bridge?

Dr Ghaffari believes a dental implant provides the most advantages over other tooth replacement options.

"In addition to looking and functioning like a natural tooth, a dental implant replaces a single tooth without sacrificing the health of neighbouring teeth," he explains. "The other common treatment for the loss of single tooth, a tooth-supported fixed bridge, requires that adjacent teeth be ground down to support the cemented bridge.

"Because a dental implant will replace your tooth root, the bone is better preserved. With a bridge, some of the bone that previously surrounded the tooth begins to deteriorate. Dental implants integrate with your jawbone, helping to keep the bone healthy and intact. In the long term, a single implant can be more aesthetic and easier to keep clean." **A**