

FOR NON-ORAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

# Adult Oral Health

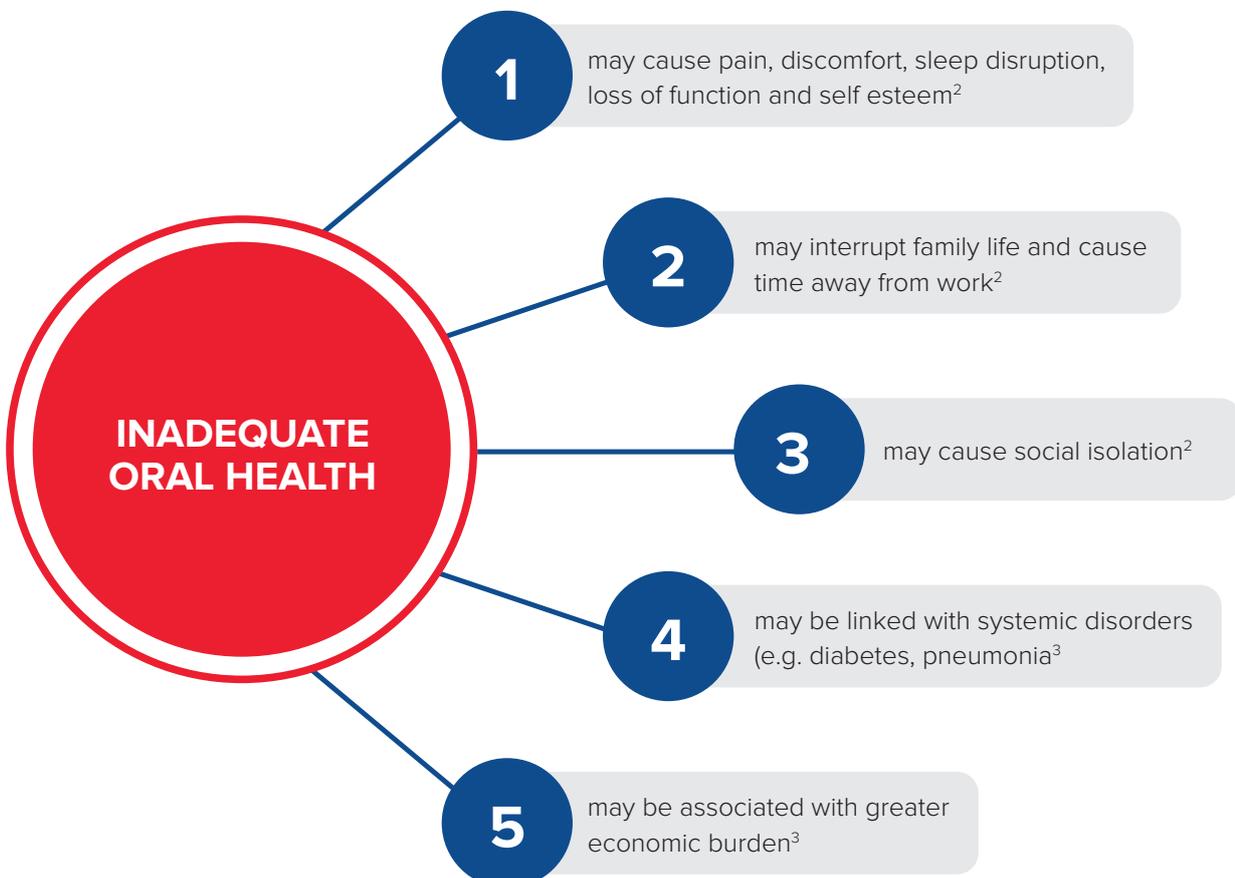
## Background

Oral health is an important element in overall wellness. It entails more than simply having good teeth. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines good oral health as “the state of the mouth, teeth and orofacial structures that enables individuals to perform essential functions such as eating, breathing and speaking and encompasses psychosocial dimensions such as self-confidence, well-being and the ability to socialize and work without pain, discomfort and embarrassment. Oral health varies over the life course from early life to old age, is integral to general health and supports individuals in participating in society and achieving their potential”<sup>1</sup>.

Oral diseases are a major and preventable public health issue affecting adults’ overall health. As such, this fact sheet aims to provide non-dental healthcare professionals with an understanding of the:

- importance of maintaining good oral health;
- importance of establishing a routine for optimal oral health;
- oral healthcare delivery framework – Ask, Look, Decide, Act and Document.

## Importance of good oral health



## Recommendations for optimal oral health

### Brush

Teeth should be brushed for 2 minutes, twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, including just before bedtime. Check the label on your toothpaste to ensure it contains the appropriate amount of fluoride—1,350 to 1500 ppm for adults.

### Auxiliary oral hygiene aids

#### Regular use:

Dental floss and/or interdental cleaners to prevent gum disease. A tongue scraper/cleaner to prevent halitosis (bad breath).

### Diet

Reduce both the amount and frequency of sugar in your diet.

**Tip:** eat sweet foods or treats as part of a meal instead of between meals.

### Dentist visits

Get regular dental check-ups, even if you don't have any noticeable oral or dental issues. Note: Appointment intervals should be set based on individual risk levels.

### Lifestyle

Avoid tobacco use and limit alcohol consumption as they increase the risk of gum disease, tooth decay, oral infections and oral cancer.

### Denture hygiene

Denture-wearers should clean their teeth and dentures separately, twice a day, including before bed. Removable dentures should be taken out before sleeping.

**TIP:** If your patient experiences xerostomia (dry mouth), they should do the following<sup>8</sup>:

- Stimulate salivary flow by chewing sugar-free gum.
- Enhance chewing and swallowing by drinking water with meals and staying hydrated throughout the day.
- For added moisture, explore options like alcohol-free mouth rinse, moisturizing mouth spray/gel, or artificial saliva.
- Avoid carbonated drinks, caffeine, tobacco, and alcohol.
- Use lip balm to keep the lips nourished and smooth.
- Consult a dentist.

Maintaining oral health is a necessary life skill with extensive implications for general well-being. Regular brushing, flossing and dental check-ups help prevent tooth decay, gum disease, and other oral health disorders that can influence quality of life. Furthermore, a healthy mouth has been related to improved communication and self-confidence, emphasizing the long-term importance of addressing dental health in our everyday routines.

# Oral healthcare delivery framework

## Ask

1. How often do you brush/floss your teeth (how many times and when)?
2. Do you eat anything after brushing your teeth at night?
3. Are there any difficulties or limitations in performing oral hygiene tasks due to physical or cognitive factors?
4. Are you experiencing any oral pain or discomfort?
5. Are you experiencing any persistent bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth?
6. Have you had any issues with loose teeth or difficulty chewing?
7. When did you last visit a dentist or dental hygienist?
8. Do you engage in smoking or drinking alcohol?
9. Are you currently taking any medications?
10. Do you have a history of tooth grinding (bruxism) or clenching?
11. Have you noticed any changes in your self-esteem or self-confidence recently?
12. Have you experienced any difficulties in completing your work or tasks due to oral health issues?
13. Have you noticed any changes in your motivation or ability to socialize with friends and family lately?
14. Have you avoided any social situations or events because of concerns about your oral health?
15. Have you missed any workdays due to oral health problems?
16. Have you noticed any changes in your eating habits or dietary choices because of your oral health?
17. How do you feel about your smile and the appearance of your teeth?
18. Have you sought professional help or advice regarding your oral health concerns?



## Look

As a non-dental professional, when checking the oral cavity of an adult, you should look for the following:

1. **Oral hygiene:** Observe the overall oral hygiene, such as the cleanliness of the teeth and the presence of plaque or tartar buildup (white hard or sticky deposit on teeth).
2. **Gum health:** Check for signs of inflammation, such as redness, swelling, or bleeding. During the menopausal phase, hormonal changes can significantly affect the health of teeth and gums, leading to a higher susceptibility to local mechanical injuries, reduced resistance to infections, and an imbalance of oral bacteria.<sup>9</sup>
3. **Bone level:** Check for receding gums, loose teeth, and exposed tooth roots. Menopausal women have a higher risk of bone loss.<sup>9</sup>
4. **Tooth decay:** Look for signs of cavities, such as brown or black spots on the teeth.
5. **Oral infections:** Check for signs of oral infections, such as white or red patches on the gums, tongue, or cheeks.
6. **Oral cancer:** Look for any signs of oral cancer, such as white or red patches on the gums, tongue, or cheeks, any lumps or bumps in the mouth, or any oral lesion that has existed for more than two weeks.
7. **Psychological:** Look for any sign of low self-esteem, depression (moving and speaking slowly, changes in appetite or weight, lack of energy),<sup>10</sup> increased stress (muscle tension, headaches, constant worrying),<sup>11</sup> or social isolation.

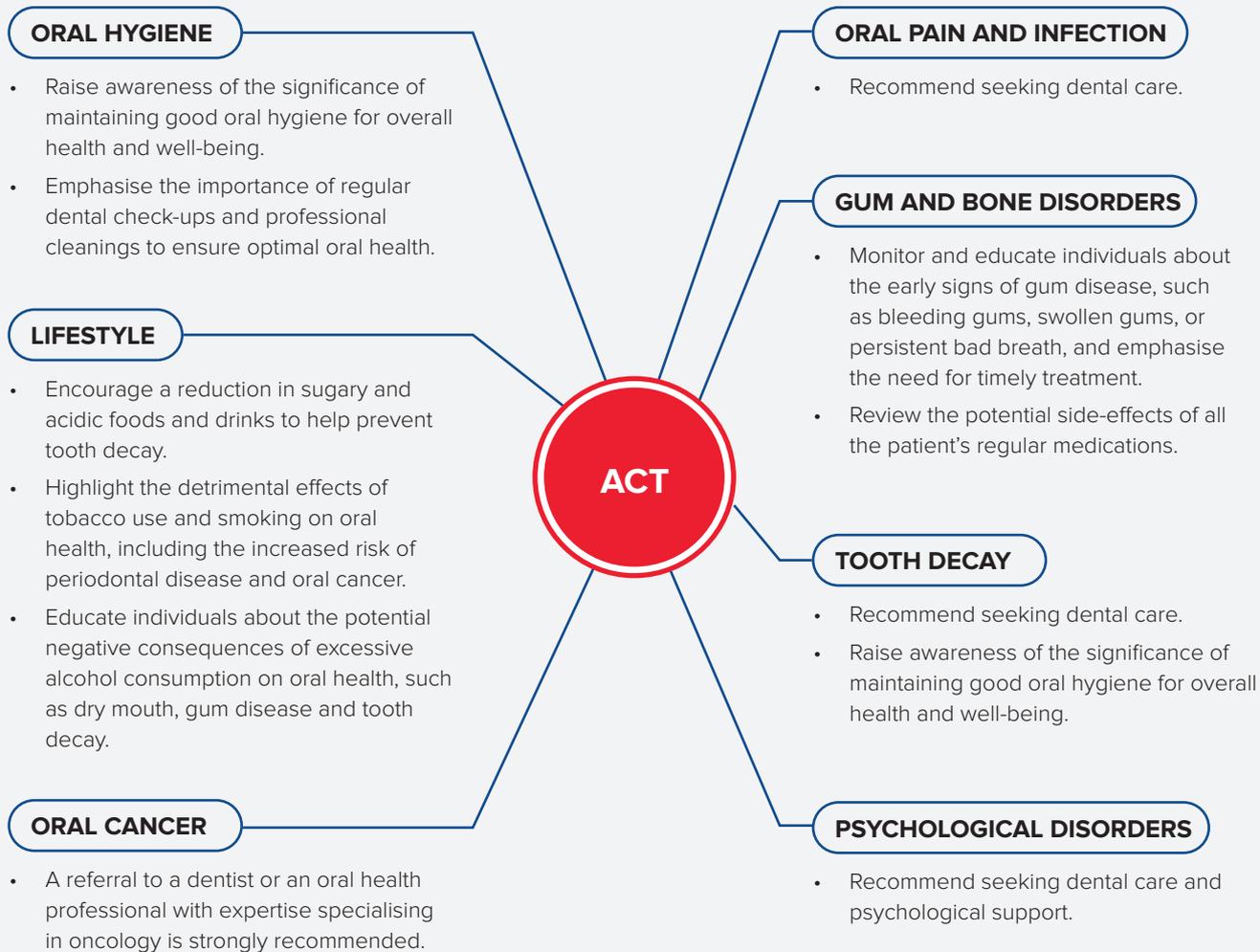
**TIP:** Remember to examine the medications being taken and their potential impact on oral tissues. For instance, the epilepsy medication phenytoin can cause enlargement of gingiva (gum tissue).<sup>12</sup>



## Decide

1. If the patient needs immediate dental attention (e.g. for an infection or suspected oral cancer), it is important to make an urgent dental referral.
2. If collaborative management with a dental specialist is necessary, ensure to co-ordinate the patient's care accordingly.

## Act



## Document

- Examine and document the patient's current oral health status by observing any signs of oral disease, such as bleeding, redness, swelling of the gums, and recurrent bad breath. Keep a record of any mouth pain or infection, such as toothaches or abscesses. Additionally, make a note of the patient's oral hygiene practices, including the frequency of brushing and flossing.
- Medication records: Keep track of all current drugs the patient is taking, such as antibiotics or pain relievers. This information is critical when assessing potential interactions or negative effects of dental treatments.
- Emotional well-being: Inquire if the patient has experienced shame or pain related to their oral health, which might have interfered with their work or daily life. Understanding emotional well-being is critical for giving appropriate support and resolving any underlying difficulties.

## This factsheet is supported by:



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## Other Resources

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### Disclaimer:

The provided fact sheet offers general information and may require adaptation to suit the unique scope of work and regulations governing other healthcare professionals in each country.

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