



THEME 6

Oral health

Theme introduction

Background

Oral health is important for general health and wellbeing. Poor oral health can affect someone's ability to eat, speak, smile and socialise normally, for example, due to pain or social embarrassment.

Oral health problems include gum (periodontal) disease, tooth decay (dental caries), tooth loss and oral cancers.

Many of the risk factors – diet, oral hygiene, smoking, alcohol, stress and trauma – are the same as for many chronic conditions, such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease. So steps taken to improve oral health will improve general health as well, and vice versa.

For that reason, this theme has obvious links to many of the other health and wellbeing themes in Skilled for Health, including healthy food and drink, smoking, alcohol and mental wellbeing.

Dental extractions are one of the most common reasons for anaesthesia in under 5s and tooth decay is now a leading cause of parents seeking medical help and advice. For this reason, a section on children's teeth and oral health has been included.

National targets/policies

Public Health England's guidance 'Delivering Better Oral Health' (2014) highlights the positive impact a healthy lifestyle has on oral health; in particular the role played by good tooth brushing habits and a healthy diet, along with stopping tobacco use and reducing alcohol consumption to within the lower risk guidelines.

To help prevent tooth decay, the guidance recommends:

- Advising parents and carers regarding their children's diets and tooth brushing habits. Brushing children's teeth as soon as they erupt at about 6 months, brushing before bed and at least one other time daily using a fluoride toothpaste.
- Advising adults and parents and carers regarding the strength of fluoride toothpaste to use for themselves and their children and that after brushing, to spit out excess toothpaste and saliva, not to rinse with either water or a mouthwash.
- Eating a healthy, balanced diet based on the eatwell plate and reducing the amount of sugar consumed will help prevent dental caries. Avoid consuming foods and drinks containing added sugar before bedtime, as the mouth produces less saliva at night to protect your teeth.
- Tobacco use seriously affects general and oral health. People who use tobacco should receive advice to stop and be offered support to do so, with a referral to their local stop smoking service.

- Drinking alcohol above the national guidelines adversely affects oral health, including significantly increasing the risk of oral cancers. Dental teams should identify any risk and offer brief advice on how to work towards drinking within the consumption guidelines and refer potentially dependent drinkers to local support services.

This theme

This theme includes the following topics:

- Taking care of your mouth and teeth
- Children's teeth
- Visiting the dentist

Further information and suggestions

- Public Health England 'Delivering better oral health: an evidence-based toolkit for prevention' (Published 12 June 2014; updated 22 March 2017).
- NICE guideline [NG30] 'Oral health promotion: general dental practice' (Published date: December 2015)
- NICE – Public health guideline [PH55] 'Oral health: local authorities and partners' (Published date: October 2014)
- NHS website: www.nhs.uk has information about how to look after your teeth and about NHS dental treatments.
- Oral Health Foundation is an independent charity dedicated to improving oral health and wellbeing around the world. They provide expert, independent and impartial advice on all aspects of oral health directly to those who need it most.
- Colgate 'Bright Smiles Bright Futures' is an education programme which promotes healthy oral care habits among young patients and their families.

Mapping to Functional Skills/Core Curriculum

Topic	Functional Skills		Core Curriculum	
	English	Maths	Literacy/Language (L)	Numeracy (N)
1 Taking care of your mouth and teeth	L1.14 E3.8 E3.1 L1.1 E3.3 L1.23		Rt/L1.5 Rw/E3.1 SLr/E3.3 SLr/L1.1 Lr/E3.4 Wt/L1.2	
2 Children's teeth	L1.14 E3.8 E3.1 L1.1 E3.3 E3.9		Rt/L1.5 Rw/E3.1 SLr/E3.3 SLr/L1.1 Lr/E3.4 Rt/E3.7	
3 Visiting the dentist	L1.14 E3.8 L1.1 E2.18		Rt/L1.5 Rw/E3.1 SLr/L1.1 Wt/E3.5a	