

20TH MARCH 2026

WORLD ORAL HEALTH DAY



Celebrating
YEARS



WORLD ORAL HEALTH DAY, 20TH MARCH 2026. "A HAPPY MOUTH IS A HAPPY LIFE"

Today is World Oral Health Day which is celebrated every year in March serves an important reminder to care for your oral health in every stage of life. Oral diseases are a major health concern for many countries with the World Health Organisation estimates that nearly 3.5 to 3.7 billion people worldwide are affected by Oral Diseases, 2.5 billion people are affected by untreated dental caries (cavities) and 1 billion suffer from severe periodontal (gum) disease. Oral diseases can lead to pain, loss of self-confidence, social isolation and are often linked to other several health issues. PNG experiencing one of the highest rates of oral cancer in the world due to the consumption of betel nut and is one of the leading causes of death for both men and women across the country even though its mostly preventable or treatable in its early stages. Receiving dental care in PNG can be a challenge for many with a shortage in qualified dentists and many people living in rural areas of PNG. Many oral diseases are preventable through good oral hygiene and leading a healthy lifestyle. Prevention is always better than cure. Taking care of your mouth and accessing care when any changes occur can make a huge difference in the long run not just for your mouth but for your whole body.

In 2024 and 2025 with the support of the Sir Brian Bell Foundation YWAM Medical Ships - Australia & PNG (YWAM MS) conducted a collaborative School Dental Outreach Program at New Erima Junior High School for students in grades prep through to year ten. The program assisted with restoring teeth affected by dental decay to reduce pain so they could focus on their studies. The team also conducted health education sessions which included the risks of oral cancer caused by chewing betelnut and tobacco use. Students also received a Colgate Bright Smiles Bright Future pack which includes toothbrushes and toothpaste to improve oral hygiene.

"Your health matters, taking the time to brush your teeth can make a huge difference not only for your oral health but for your general health and wellbeing. A healthy smile can boost your confidence, brush and floss and see a dentist regularly" commented Sir Brian Bell Foundation CEO Bronwyn Wright.

This World Oral Health Day make positive steps to look after your oral health. Some simple things you can do are eating a healthy diet, brushing your teeth, flossing regularly, seeing a dentist for regular check-ups, avoiding tobacco, betelnut and alcohol.

WORLD DENTAL FEDERATION:

On the 20 March every year, we ask the world to unite to help reduce the burden of oral diseases, which affect individuals, health systems and economies everywhere. 2026 raises awareness about the importance of caring for your mouth at every stage of life - from birth through later years. Every day, we use our mouths in countless ways, and a healthy mouth makes life more enjoyable.

It supports our whole body and makes everyday moments brighter – whether sharing a meal, chatting with a friend, or laughing with loved ones. So, join us once again to make every smile a healthier, happier one.

Learn more: www.worldoralhealthday.org/campaign-theme-2026

Oral diseases affect nearly 3.5 billion people worldwide according to World Health Organization (WHO) with tooth decay being the most common health condition. Oral diseases can cause causing pain, discomfort, disfigurement and even death and although they begin in the mouth, they cannot be prevented by focusing on the mouth alone. Increased consumption worldwide of food and beverages high in sugar, as well as tobacco and alcohol contribute to oral health conditions and other non-communicable diseases. Most oral health conditions are largely preventable and can be treated in their early stages; however, left untreated can negatively impact the mouth as well as the rest of the body. The circumstances in which people live and their level of access to care plays a role in oral disease development however, eating a well-balanced diet free from sugar, avoiding alcohol, tobacco, and betelnut will reduce your risk.

SOME ORAL HEALTH CONDITIONS INCLUDE:

Tooth decay: Tooth decay, also known as dental caries or cavities, is a disease that causes the breakdown of tooth enamel. Once tooth decay has eroded the enamel, cavities can start to form, which can cause tooth sensitivity, pain, white or dark spots on the teeth, bad breath and difficulty biting some foods. A dentist will be able to recommend treatment for a person with tooth decay, depending on the severity; however, it can result in fillings, crowns, or tooth extraction. To avoid tooth decay, it is important to brush your teeth at least twice a day and floss to remove plaque between the teeth, as well as attend regular dental check-ups.

Gum disease: Gum disease occurs when the tissue that surrounds and supports your teeth becomes infected. There are 2 main types of gum disease, including gingivitis and periodontitis. Gingivitis is a mild form of gum disease which occurs when the gums become red and swollen and may also bleed easily when brushed. If gingivitis is not treated, it may cause a more severe form of gum disease called periodontitis which can destroy the bone that supports your teeth and cause teeth to loosen or lead to tooth loss. Signs of gum disease can include inflammation, redness, bleeding, bad breath, and sponginess of the gums. To prevent gum disease, gently brush your teeth and gums twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste and visit your dentist regularly for a check-up and cleaning.

Oral cancer: Oral cancer can affect any part of the mouth, including the lips, gums, inside lining of the cheeks, tongue, roof of the mouth and under the tongue. Oral cancer can be life-threatening if not diagnosed and treated early, which is why regular dental check-ups are important. While the symptoms of oral cancer vary, anyone experiencing any of the following for more than 2

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www.facebook.com/sirbrianbellfoundation



weeks should see a doctor or dentist: difficulty chewing or swallowing, a growth in the mouth, pain in the mouth, ear pain or loose teeth. It is important to remember that these are not definitive signs of oral cancer but may be caused by other conditions it is always better to get checked with your doctor or dentist.

LOOK AFTER YOUR ORAL HEALTH:

Poor oral hygiene can have long term consequences on the mouth and body. Tooth decay can cause discomfort and pain, while untreated gum infections can result in tooth loss and an increased risk of developing heart disease. Regular dental check-ups ensure that issues such as tooth decay, gingivitis, and periodontitis are identified and treated. Look after your mouth, teeth, and gums with a few helpful tips:

Reduce acid attacks: exposure to acidic food and drinks during meals softens the enamel of your teeth. Brushing your teeth immediately after consuming acidic foods and drinks increases the chance of enamel erosion. This can be prevented by rinsing with water immediately and avoid brushing for at least 30 minutes.

Limit dental plaque: adopt good oral hygiene habits at home, brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, and floss at least once a day after mealtimes.

Avoid alcohol: Harmful use of alcohol is a major risk factor for cancers of the mouth, larynx, pharynx, and oesophagus and acts as an irritant, especially in the mouth and throat. Drinking excessive alcohol also increases the risk of facial and dental injuries due to falls, road crashes, and violent confrontations with others. Alcoholic drinks are often acidic and high in sugar, which increases the risk of tooth decay.

Quit smoking: Tobacco use can lead to tooth staining, gum disease, and in more severe cases, mouth cancer. Regardless of how long you have used tobacco products, quitting now can greatly reduce these serious risks to your health. If you are having trouble quitting smoking talk to your doctor.

Don't chew betel nut: World Health Organisation has classified betel nut as a carcinogen as many studies have shown a convincing link between betel nut use and cancer of the mouth and oesophagus. Regular betel nut use can also cause gum irritation, tooth decay and staining of the teeth, as well as an increased risk for oral submucous fibrosis, an incurable condition that can cause stiffness in the mouth and eventually the loss of jaw movement. Smoking tobacco and chewing betel nut together further increases the risk of developing oral cancers.

Eat a healthy diet: What you eat, and drink can have a major effect on your oral health. Consuming excessive amounts of sugar from snacks, processed food, and soft drinks not only causes tooth decay but can contribute to obesity and increase your risk of diabetes.

Take special care when pregnant: during pregnancy, women experience hormonal changes that can affect their gums (causing swelling or tenderness), which makes them more prone to gingivitis. Left untreated, gingivitis can develop into more serious gum disease, which increases the risk for preterm and low birth weight infants. Make time to practice good oral hygiene to keep your mouth healthy throughout pregnancy.

Visit the dentist regularly: Signs of tooth decay, gum disease, and other oral conditions can be noticed early and treated when you visit the dentist regularly.

Practice good oral hygiene habits: Good oral care is essential for a healthy mouth at all ages, daily preventive care, including proper brushing and flossing, will help stop problems before they develop and can save money and cause less pain in the long run. Brushing your teeth twice a day removes food particles and dental plaque that can damage teeth and gums over time. Flossing daily helps to remove food and plaque that's stuck in crevices or between the teeth which can cause significant issues over time. Remember to replace your toothbrush every 3-4 months or sooner if you have been sick or if bristles are frayed.

LOOK AFTER YOUR MOUTH TEETH & GUMS IN 6 EASY STEPS:

1. Place the toothbrush at a 45° angle along the gum line. Move the toothbrush in a small, circular motion, and repeat for each tooth.
2. Brush the inside surface of each tooth, using the same back and forth technique.
3. Brush the chewing surface (top) of each tooth.
4. Use the tip of the brush to brush behind each tooth - front and back, top and bottom, and up and down strokes.
5. Be sure to brush your tongue to remove odour, causing bacteria.
6. Pull approximately 30cm of dental floss from the floss dispenser. Wrap the ends of the floss around your index and middle fingers. Hold the floss tightly around each tooth in a C shape; move the floss back and forth in a push-pull motion and up and down against the side of each tooth.

Don't forget to brush twice a day,
floss at least once a day
and schedule regular
check-ups at the dentist.

