



# DENTAL UPDATE

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## DENTAL MYTHS

There are more misconceptions about dentistry than any other profession. Here are 10 myths.

### 1. Teeth become weaker as you get older.

Just the opposite. Teeth become harder and resistant to decay as we age, since they keep absorbing mineral. Of course, older people grew up before fluoridation and usually have large fillings. These sometimes deteriorate with time and fail to support teeth which were hollowed out years earlier. They often *do* need more dentistry but usually not because of fresh decay.

The only real problem is when seniors start take various medications for blood pressure etc. Some medications can reduce the salivary flow and dry the mouth out. Saliva is important because it controls bacteria and keeps the enamel strong by bathing it in calcium. Any reduction can put the teeth slightly at risk.

### 2. Mouthwashes are an effective treatment for gingivitis.

Mouthwashes such as *Listerine* and *Cepacol* have been shown to reduce gingivitis and bacteria by about a third. Stronger chlorhexidine products, such as *Savocol*, perform slightly better. Conversely, a one third reduction does still leave a whopping two thirds, which can mean millions of harmful bacteria and significant gum disease. It is not a big improvement.

Antiseptic rinses should only be considered a small part of eliminating bacteria and treating gingivitis. The best way to remove the bugs is mechanically, by brushing properly.

Sensible, efficient toothbrushing will quickly remove 99% of the bacteria around the edges of the gums, and an obvious improvement will usually be seen in a few days.

When infections are severe, the most effective antibacterial is not, in fact, a mouthwash, but a gel which can be rubbed onto the gums. **Curasept Gel** contains concentrated chlorhexidene. **Continued ...**



## A PERFECT CLEAN

Getting teeth perfectly clean has to be a team effort between the dentist and patient. Guess who has to do most of the work? That's right - the patient!

Start by using a soft brush since the bristles will reach the crevices better. Open only half way to relax the cheeks and lips and gain better access to the back.

Brush aggressively, but in circles so those bristles really get in.

Plaque always collects in the trickiest spots, so include the edges of the gums as well, even though they may initially be a little tender. To clean the inside of the lower teeth, raise the elbow high and angle the brush downwards.

And every six months ask us to clean off any tartar and staining professionally.



## FIBRE RE ENFORCED

White composite resin fillings have been around for forty years and have improved vastly in that time. They now come in scores of colours and are made specifically for front or back teeth.

One problem has been that they lack the high strength of amalgam since microscopic surface cracks occasionally propagate and extend deep through the body of the material, leading to fracturing.

The new **EverX** material is super tough because it contains fine glass fibres, similar to the carbon fibre in racing cars. These arrest the growth of superficial cracklines and stop them in their tracks.

For large reconstructions at the back of the mouth this composite now provides extra durability, not just for the filling but also the walls of the tooth.

### 3. **Grown ups do not need fluoride.**

Yes and no. Firstly, let's explain. Fluoride's main action is topical, not dietary. In other words it is absorbed when teeth get wet with either fluoridated water or toothpaste. There are a number of beneficial effects.

Fluoride changes immature enamel's crystalline structure from weak hydroxyapatite into strong fluoroapatite. As well as becoming part of the chemical structure, it also acts as a catalyst to draw in extra calcium and phosphate. The surface of the enamel hardens and becomes more acid resistant. Plaque bacteria even find it more difficult to adhere. In time the fluoride leaches out but this actually has the effect of inhibiting bacterial growth on the adjacent surfaces.

Grown ups have stronger teeth but some still get decay, especially when they develop *dry mouth*. A strong fluoride toothpaste such as Neutraflur, brushed in once a week can be an insurance policy against decay.



### 4. **Wisdom teeth cause crowding.**

Crowding seems to have nothing to do with the wisdom teeth. Often when these third molars are jammed in and impacted, the teeth in front become crowded and crooked, but the same happens when the wisdom teeth are not even present!

Nature is somewhat behind the times. It assumes we are still in the Stone Age, eating bush tucker and wearing our teeth out, not just vertically, but horizontally. Nature does not want us to develop gaps between these abraded teeth so she uses a mechanism called *Mesial Drift* to pull the teeth together towards the front of

the mouth.

Of course, with our modern diet we do not wear out the walls of our teeth, but still they tend to drift together and buckle up. Wisdom teeth sometimes need to be extracted, but not to prevent crowding.

### 5. **The grown up teeth erupt as the baby teeth fall out.**

The six year old molars do not replace deciduous teeth but rather erupt at the back of the mouth *behind* them. Parents are often surprised to be told their children have permanent molars when no baby teeth have been lost.

These grown-up teeth usually have pits and fissures which easily collect plaque so it is wise for the dentist to place protective sealants over the surface soon after they appear. The process only takes a few minutes and the covering not only blocks plaque, it also hardens the enamel by releasing minerals.

### 6. **Baby teeth don't matter.**

Decay reaches the nerve of children's deciduous teeth very easily, and, when they hurt, it is already too late to fill them – they have to be extracted. Within a few weeks of a baby tooth being lost, the ones behind start to move forward and close up the gap. Later, during adolescence when permanent teeth try to erupt, there is insufficient space and teeth become crowded at the front. Orthodontic braces are needed to straighten them up.

Complications can be avoided by filling the baby teeth early and saving them until they are lost naturally.



### 7. **Cosmetic Dentists can improve the front teeth.**

There is no such thing as a Cosmetic Dentist, only dentists who advertise more. Of course some dentists are more skilled and experienced than others. To find out what we can do at our clinic look at some of the published articles on the website [www.dentalupdate.info](http://www.dentalupdate.info).

### 8. **Root filled teeth go dark.**

In the old days, the crowns of teeth were not always cleaned out properly when they were being root filled. Debris contaminated the enamel and, in time, it turned dark, like a bruise that would not go away.

Today's dentists realise all the pulp has to be removed from the crown, as well as from the root canal. If this is done, there is a far greater chance of success and the tooth will not turn dark.

### 9. **Electric brushes clean better.**

Sometimes. Electric brushes actually do clean better *where they reach*, but it is still possible to clean very poorly around the inaccessible areas. They have to be aimed properly and they still have to brush, otherwise the bristles will just skim over the surfaces rather than angle into the crevices.



### 10. **Brushing too hard scratches the teeth.**

Not really. Brushing sideways is actually what does all the damage.

## DOES THE TOOTH NEED A CAP?

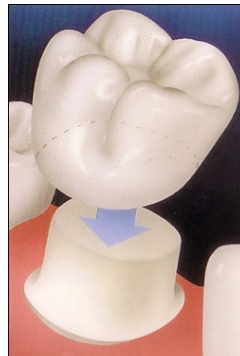
Most people do not know what a cap actually is and neither do dentists, believe it or not! The word cap is a layman's term so it can mean anything.

Usually, though, patients are probably referring to a crown - a complete covering of a tooth. It is made in a laboratory and can consist of porcelain, metal or, these days, super strong white zirconia.

Dentists start considering crowns when teeth are weak, display broad cracklines and when the bite is heavy. In other words, when the prognosis of a large filling is uncertain and extra strength is needed to protect what part of the tooth remains.

The other occasion when a crown may be suggested is for a dark front tooth, where it is thought bleaching and bonding may not be appropriate for the best result.

Preparing a tooth for a crown does take a little time. All the surfaces have to be reduced and the walls prepared to a slight taper. Because crowns are inflexible and not made of rubber, any bulges in the walls have to be smoothed out. An impression is then taken, sent to the laboratory and a week or so later the crown cemented over the base of the tooth. Many crowns last a lifetime.



**Can you pick the crown? Today's materials are strong and aesthetic.**

As well as being extremely strong, crowns can look amazingly natural, mimicking enamel in a very realistic way.

The only reservation is the amount of drilling the underlying tooth is subjected to.

This is not an issue when teeth are root-filled but when teeth are vital care must be taken not to damage a healthy nerve.

Dentists should always think twice before crowning live teeth.

## TURMERIC

These days many people take fish oil capsules because of their protective anti-oxidant effect.

The spice turmeric is also gaining a very healthy reputation.

Countries such as India, where it is regularly added to the curries, report less incidence of Alzheimer's disease.

The effect seems to be due to one of its key components, *curcumin*. This anti-oxidant reduces the level of beta amyloid plaques in the brain, which appear to be directly linked to developing dementia.

For those who do not like curries, turmeric is available from the health food store in capsules.

## HITTING THE AIRWAVES

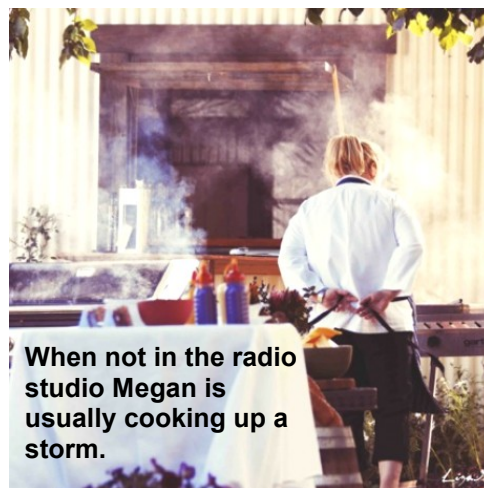
Our eldest daughter Megan is a successful chef, having studied with the famous Charlie Trotter in Chicago and worked as executive chef with The Big Group. These days she runs her own catering company, The Kitchen Door, in Mansfield.

But when not at the oven on a Saturday morning Megan presents her own radio program over community radio. She talks about local events, gives cooking advice, plays music and, in Summer time, issues bushfire warnings. There is an audience of quite a few thousand.

A few weeks back we drove up to the high country and Megan interviewed me for a couple of hours. It was great fun. We joked around, talked a bit about dentistry and toothbrushing and I got to play my own CDs including Steve Martin from The Little Shop Of Horrors expounding the joys of 'Being a Dentist'.

Because the studio is virtually a shopfront on the main street there was even some interaction with locals as they walked by.

Afterwards folk said they enjoyed the program, including even the jokes. Some commented I had a fine speaking voice. The family offered a slightly different opinion - I had a wonderful face and it was especially suited to radio!



**When not in the radio studio Megan is usually cooking up a storm.**

**HINT** To clean at the back of the mouth, create more space by closing. The cheek muscles will relax and there will actually be more room to move the brush freely.

## QUOTE, UNQUOTE

With more people texting or sending off curt emails these days, the art of actually speaking is, kind of, like, you know – sort of declining. Sometimes it is hard to find the right words to say.

Here are some hints. Unless you are an AFL footballer, never say ‘*Yeah, No*’ when preceding a discussion. Try to avoid ‘*You know*’ because a lot of the time people do not know, but may perhaps be interested in finding out. And if all else fails, quote appropriate lines from the movies. Here are some examples.

### *It's the vibe, its Marbo, it's the constitution.*

Nick the lawyer expertly arguing legalities before the court in **The Castle**. When friendly discussions turn to heated arguments it is always helpful to make a few fine points of law.



### *Hasta la vista, baby!*

In other words *Cheerio. Bye, bye*. The hard part is reproducing Arnold Schwarzeneger's Austrian accent, as in **Terminator II**. For good measure, you can throw in *I'll be back!*

### *I want the truth!*

To which the answer is - *You can't handle the truth!* Useful for rebellious adolescents accused of drinking, smoking, coming home late etc. Few can do it like Jack Nicholson in **A Few Good Men**.

### *Miranda!*

When on a meander through the bush, or even a stroll in the park, and one's companion disappears out of sight, a little drama can be added to the day by imitating the frantic schoolgirl from **Picnic At Hanging Rock**. (For maximum effect the tone should be loud and frightened.)



### *What have the Romans ever done for us?*

... apart from roads, education, sanitation etc. A very good line when talking politics and arguing against the government of the day. Best if said ironically, as in **The Life Of Brian**.



### *What's the matter? Can't you make up your mind?*

The Strawman from **Wizard Of Oz** had a nice response to this presumptuous question - *That's just the problem, I don't have one. Only straw*. Can be quite disarming when delivered correctly.

### *Come on Monsieur. It is only wafer thin... wafer thin!*

Appropriate at the end of a formal meal when the company's appetite is waning. In Monty Python's **The Meaning Of Life** the maitre de urges the fat

man to eat one more morsel, just before he explodes. (Medically, this is highly unlikely.)



### *Well, La-de-da. La-de-da.*

A good fill-in line when thinking of something more intelligent to say. It worked well for Dianne Keaton in Woody Allen's **Annie Hall**.

### *Just don't mention the war.*

When discretion is important just follow Basil's example from **Fawlty Towers**. If uncertain and in need of explanation simply enquire *Che, Mr. Fawlty?*



### *I'll have what she's having.*

A reliable suggestion when undecided over the restaurant menu. The challenge is to keep a straight face after Meg Ryan's burst of emotion, dining out **When Harry Met Sally**.



### *Yo, dude.*

Actually, best to be avoided unless you want to sound like a drug manufacturer from **Breaking Bad**.