NHS dental myth buster

How often do I need to be seen by a dentist?

What this guide is about

This guide is for NHS dental patients. It explains common myths and facts about dental check-ups and tells you what to do if you need help before your next check-up.

How often you need a check-up, sometimes called your recall interval, should reflect how healthy your gums and teeth are and the risk of future problems

You may not need a dental check-up every six months and your dental team will discuss what is right for you. This may be shorter or longer than six months

Myth	What this means for you
Myth **Everyone needs a check-up every six months**	**Fact** If your teeth and gums are healthy, you don't need another check-up for up to two years. Children need check-ups more often because decay can grow faster in baby teeth. Your dentist or dental team should recommend when you need your next check-up based on your oral health. This will be based on things such as: • whether you have had tooth decay or gum disease • what you eat and drink • whether you smoke or drink alcohol • your general health • your age • how easy it is for you to keep your mouth healthy If you have tooth decay or gum disease, you might need a check-up every three months.

Myth	What this means for you
Myth **If my next check-up is more than six months away, I will lose access to NHS dental care.**	**Fact** If your teeth and gums are healthy, your dentist or dental team may recommend a longer time between check-ups. This is based on your individual oral health needs and risk of future dental problems. A longer interval should not, in itself, affect your access to NHS dental care, provided you attend in line with the advice from your dental team. It may also mean that you need fewer routine appointments and pay NHS dental charges less often.
Myth **I should not ask questions about my dental care**	**Fact** You could ask your dentist or other dental team member, during your appointment: • When should I have my next check-up, and why? • What changes mean I should contact you sooner? • How can I stop tooth decay or gum disease? • Who will give each part of my NHS care? • Who should I contact if I have bad pain, swelling, bleeding that will not stop, an injury, a fever, or I feel very unwell? • Who should I contact about urgent care when the practice is closed?
Myth **If I have pain or swelling, I must wait for my next check-up**	**Fact** Do not wait if you have an urgent dental problem. If you have a sudden dental problem, like pain, bleeding or a cracked tooth, contact your dentist to book an appointment for urgent or emergency dental care. They may be able to offer you: • an urgent appointment at short notice • advice where to get out-of-hours treatment If you do not have a dentist or still need help, check your dental symptoms with NHS 111 online or call 111.

Myth	What this means for you
Myth **A scale and polish is always included in an NHS check-up**	**Fact** A check-up does not always include a scale and polish. If it is needed for your health, the dental team should explain how you will get it and what NHS charge you may need to pay. If it is not needed for your oral health, it may be offered as private care, so ask why you need it and what it will cost before agreeing.
Myth **If a dental therapist says I need other treatment, I must pay privately**	**Fact** If the treatment is part of your NHS treatment plan, the practice should explain who will provide it. You should not have to pay privately only because another dental professional must do part of your NHS care. Normal NHS dental charges may still apply, unless you can get free NHS dental treatment.
Myth **If my dental practice tells me it will no longer keep me on as an NHS patient, I cannot do anything.**	**Fact** You can use the NHS Find a Dentist service to look for another dental practice. Ask the practice to explain its decision. The reason may relate to its missed-appointment policy or another matter. You can also ask for information about the practice's complaints process. If you remain concerned, you can use the NHS complaints process.
Myth **My child can only get NHS dental care if I pay for private care**	**Fact** A practice should not say your child can only get NHS care if you become a private patient. You should not have to pay for your own private appointment so your child can get NHS care. Ask the practice to explain. If the problem is not fixed, you can use the NHS complaints process.

Please remember

This is general information and your dental team will give advice based on your needs.

You may have to pay NHS dental charges unless you can get free NHS dental treatment.