

body and soul



BITING FIT!

Many of us are worried about going to the dentist because of the rising cost of treatment. So how can we improve our teeth without spending too much?

How to find an NHS dentist

Call NHS direct on 0845 4647 for a list of NHS dentists in your area or go online at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk and type in your postcode. Also ask around – nothing beats a personal recommendation

How much will it cost?

NHS treatment is a lot cheaper than going private and there are now just three set prices depending on what you need.

Charges begin at £17 for a check-up, X-rays, and a scale and polish. If you need fillings this falls into the next price band – £47. If you need more extensive

work done, such as crowns or dentures, expect to pay £204 – the top price band – which would cover a course of treatment.

A private check-up costs from £25. Fillings start at around £42, root fillings about £100 and crowns from around £270.

ripped off, the fact we might be told off for neglecting our teeth and, of course, the drill.

Obviously, the longer we leave it, the worse the outcome will be.

Assuming you eat lots of sweet snacks and drinks (that includes booze!), a small cavity can become a deep cavity requiring a root filling within two years. This could then set you back £100 or more to treat.

With this in mind here's our guide to finding a dentist and getting the best home care – without paying over the odds.

According to recent research, there are many reasons why we don't go to the dentist as often as we should. These include not knowing how much it will cost, worries we'll be



How not to get ripped off

If you haven't been to a dentist for a while you may need a few fillings and possibly a crown or two and this will be expensive.

If you're concerned, ask your dentist to show you your X-rays to see the decay. And the British Dental Health Foundation helpline on 0845 063 1188 offers advice on whether your dentist is charging too much.

Alarm bells should ring if your dentist tries to

persuade you to have treatment beyond repair work, such as cosmetic procedures – veneers – or replacing amalgam fillings for white ones.

'It's one thing to make a few suggestions, but I'd be worried if your dentist was suggesting a lot of cosmetic treatment you haven't enquired about,' says dentist Beverley Scott from Smilepod in Covent Garden (www.smilepod.co.uk).

Private vs NHS

From a cost point of view, going to an NHS dentist is a no-brainer. But since the price structure changes in 2004 they are becoming an increasingly rare breed.

But there are advantages to going private. Sophisticated techniques and technology are often more readily available and there may be more options for cosmetic dentistry.

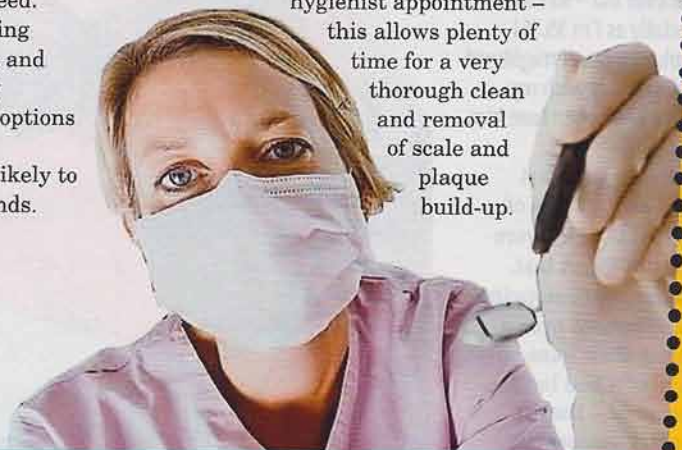
Private dentists are also more likely to be open for longer or work weekends.

What about a hygienist?

On the NHS a basic scale and polish is included in your dental

check-up price of £17. If you need a scale and polish between check-ups, it will also cost you £17.

If you go to a private dentist then you'll be looking to pay around £45 for a 30-minute hygienist appointment – this allows plenty of time for a very thorough clean and removal of scale and plaque build-up.



What you need at home

Looking after your teeth well at home will help reduce how much treatment you need.

1 Look for a fluoride toothpaste with a content of at least 1450 parts per million (it's on the pack), says dentist Beverley Scott.

The new Colgate Total toothpaste, £2.39, is designed to form a protective antibacterial barrier over your teeth for up to 12 hours.

2 Use a toothbrush with a small head and medium bristles and clean each tooth in small

circles, says Beverley Scott.

'This stops you brushing too vigorously. Avoid hard bristles as these are too abrasive on the enamel and can speed up gum recession. If they're too soft, they won't remove plaque effectively.'

3 It's important to floss, particularly as we get older and gaps between teeth widen, making it easier for food to become trapped.

If you can't get to grips with flossing, try TePe interdental brushes, £3.49 for eight, which you slot between teeth to remove food and plaque.

Teeth-friendly foods

Fruit and veg with high water content such as pears, celery and cucumber, plus nuts, cheese, sugar-free snacks, milk, tap water (it contains fluoride) and tea.

Teeth foes

Sweets (particularly gummy or hard ones that stick to teeth), cakes, biscuits, cereal bars, fruit juices, booze, cola and other sugary fizzy drinks.



Tried and tested

Put your money where your mouth is... We've tried these and think they're really effective

● **Philips Sonicare sonic electric toothbrush**, from £40.85, creates minute water bubbles around the teeth and gums which are propelled against the surfaces to help dislodge plaque.

'I use one and recommend the brush to my patients,' says dentist Beverley Scott. We couldn't agree more.

● **White Glo Extra Strength Whitening Toothpaste Professional Choice**, £4.07 at Boots (including a toothbrush and dental sticks), contains polishing particles designed not to damage tooth enamel.

We think it's one of the most effective – and cost effective – tooth whiteners out there.

● **Sensodyne Repair and Protect toothpaste**, £3.99, forms a protective layer over exposed dentine to help repair and protect sensitive areas. It really helps to desensitise teeth. Good stuff.

● **Oral B Pro-Expert**, £3.49 at Boots, claims to reduce enamel erosion, gum disease, bad breath, plaque, tartar and sensitivity, and also removes surface stains.

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