

What dental issues can occur in your 40's?

There are a number of oral health issues that can arise in your 40's. Unfortunately, dental work doesn't last forever so this is the decade when you might expect some tooth repairs.

Life expectancy of fillings

There are a number of different materials used to restore teeth.

- Old silver-amalgam fillings lasted anything from 5 years up to 20 years.
- Modern tooth-coloured filling materials last rather less time in the range of 5-10 years. These tooth-coloured fillings also stain, especially around the edges making them less attractive as time passes.

Crowns can extend the life of teeth

Some teeth need very large fillings and these are often repaired using full coverage crowns. These can be made of gold, porcelain, zirconia or a combination of these. They may last very many years (up to 30 years in many cases) and will often strengthen weakened teeth if they are well designed.

Tooth and restoration wear

Any filling material can show signs of wear. Everyday chewing, tooth clenching, grinding and sports injuries can all take their toll on the fillings in your mouth. In your 40's it is likely that some of the dental work done in your teenage years and you 20's may well have become deteriorated and need replacement.

Early detection is best

Visiting your general dentist will ensure that any filling deterioration is detected and the appropriate replacement filling options are discussed. Keeping up with your regular check-ups will ensure any minor fractures in fillings and any fillings that begin to leak can be replaced before the problem becomes more advanced.

Undetected problems don't go away

Teeth left with leaking fillings can go on to suffer extensive decay than may lead to pain, dental abscess formation and the need for root fillings or tooth extraction.

Limited restoration services

Here at NQ Surgical Dentistry, we provide tooth restorations primarily for dental phobic patients who need sedation to cope with treatment. We also offer routine general dentistry under general anaesthetic in a day surgery unit for patients who cannot be treated in a dental practice setting for medical or behavioural reasons.

This group of patients includes those patients who are unable to co-operate with the dental team, who suffer severe dental anxiety, who cannot keep still, who have behavioural problems or patients who are developmentally challenged.

Carers of these patients are welcome to contact our experienced and empathic team to discuss any concerns and arrange for a consultation to find the best way of providing dental care for their patients or family members.

Gum disease (Periodontitis)

International studies reveal that approximately 13% of a population suffer from destructive gum disease called chronic periodontitis; in Australia this approximates to 2.8 million people. Much of this disease is in the older age groups from 40 years onwards.

Untreated, gum disease destroys the bone supporting the teeth resulting in:

- Infection
- halitosis (bad breath)
- gum recession
- loose teeth and finally
- premature tooth loss.

Only patients who attend a dentist will be diagnosed and so those patients avoiding dental care will only seek treatment when the disease has become so advanced that they suffer from abscesses and loose teeth; their only option may be the removal of several teeth.

In the 40-50 year age group, many patients reach this more advanced state and as they age, the disease will continue to progress, unless it is treated.

Regular dental checks in older patients are important

Regular dental examination of the older patient groups from 40 years onwards is important to limit the damage that gum disease can cause. Here at NQ Surgical Dentistry we check all older patients carefully for any signs of gum disease. Once the condition has been detected we can provide treatment for all levels of severity of gum disease.

Dr Colin Priestland has a Master of Science degree in gum disease and is a former UK specialist in Periodontics. He works in conjunction with Sharon Everett, a highly skilled and experienced dental hygienist, to treat gum disease in all age groups but they find the majority of their patients are in the older age bracket from 40 years onwards.

Gum disease is linked to an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, and Alzheimer's disease. There is also a clear relationship between the presence of gum disease and increased severity of diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis.

If you begin to suffer from sore or inflamed gums or bleeding when you brush or floss, it is most strongly recommended that you visit your dentist for a thorough assessment and then discuss the various treatment options. In serious cases, you may be referred to a periodontist for in-depth diagnoses of the condition and if necessary, more advanced treatment.

Tooth grinding and clenching

We all suffer stress these days no matter how old we are. However, as we get older we seem to collect more and more responsibilities, both at home and at work. With this added responsibility comes increasing stress.

In your 40's, it may be work related stress of management or family stress that may be related to a host of factors including a growing family. Studies have found that the most tense participants were the most likely to grind or clench their teeth.

Clenching and grinding are not the same

Clenching and grinding are very different conditions. Put simply, grinding damages teeth and clenching damages the jaw joint and associated muscles and ligaments.

Tooth Grinding is also known as Bruxism and is often performed in your sleep. It is destructive of tooth substance and it contributes to wearing down the tooth enamel and then the underlying dentine weakening the teeth. Because of this, the teeth become more susceptible to fracture, as do the fillings in the mouth that may be badly damaged.

For patients that perform habitual clenching, this has damaging effects on your jaw joints (known as temporomandibular joints -TMJ's).

The symptoms of tooth clenching and grinding are very similar and include:

- headaches
- aching in the facial muscles
- unusual pain in the neck and shoulders
- limited opening of the mouth
- locking of the mouth and
- unusual joint noises (clicking, popping or grinding sounds).

For those stressed middle-aged managers, these are issues that arise frequently. Unexplained headaches often called tension headaches seem to affect many people in the workplace. The more stressed they are the more severe the headaches appear to be. If you suspect that you have developed these destructive habits, visit your dentist immediately for an assessment. To combat this behaviour, your dentist will advise you of various treatment options such as hard acrylic splints to wear at night, physiotherapy, low level laser therapy or medications. It is recommended to reduce caffeine and alcohol before bed and look into ways to reduce stress in your life.

Here at NQ Surgical Dentistry Dr Priestland treats many patients with temporo-mandibular joint problems in a variety of ways achieving a good level of success.

Dental stains and discolouration

Teeth with good quality enamel stain to a minor degree but teeth with poor quality enamel or exposed dentine stain far worse. This is due to enamel or dentine porosity and micro-roughness. Rough surfaces always stain more than smooth surfaces. This explains why rough tooth coloured fillings take on stain far more than highly polished fillings.

Years of indulging in red wine, coffee and other dark beverages will have an effect on your teeth. As well as this, the outer layer of enamel can wear away and reveal the dentine below that has a yellow colour. This can be unsightly and there are treatment options to mask the appearance.

Ideally, reducing the amount of stain-causing drinks is helpful but regular cleaning with a dental hygienist is also advisable.

Visit your regular dentist to discuss the best treatment to ensure your teeth remain attractive and avoid the appearance of aging dark stained fillings.