



Consumer Oral Health Survey Results 2022

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Introduction

Welcome to the Simplyhealth Consumer Oral Health Survey 2021

Every year at Simplyhealth we conduct a comprehensive consumer survey to gain invaluable insights into the nation's oral health. This enables us to keep ahead of dental trends and provide customers with the support they need to access oral healthcare and advice.

We're proud to be the UK's leading provider of health and dental plans and of our work in helping communities to access vital oral healthcare provision. This includes our recent partnership with Dentaaid, a charity that provides free dental care for homeless and vulnerable people.

A break from conducting the survey in 2020 due to the nation being in lockdown, has this year enabled us to highlight the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the oral health of UK adults.

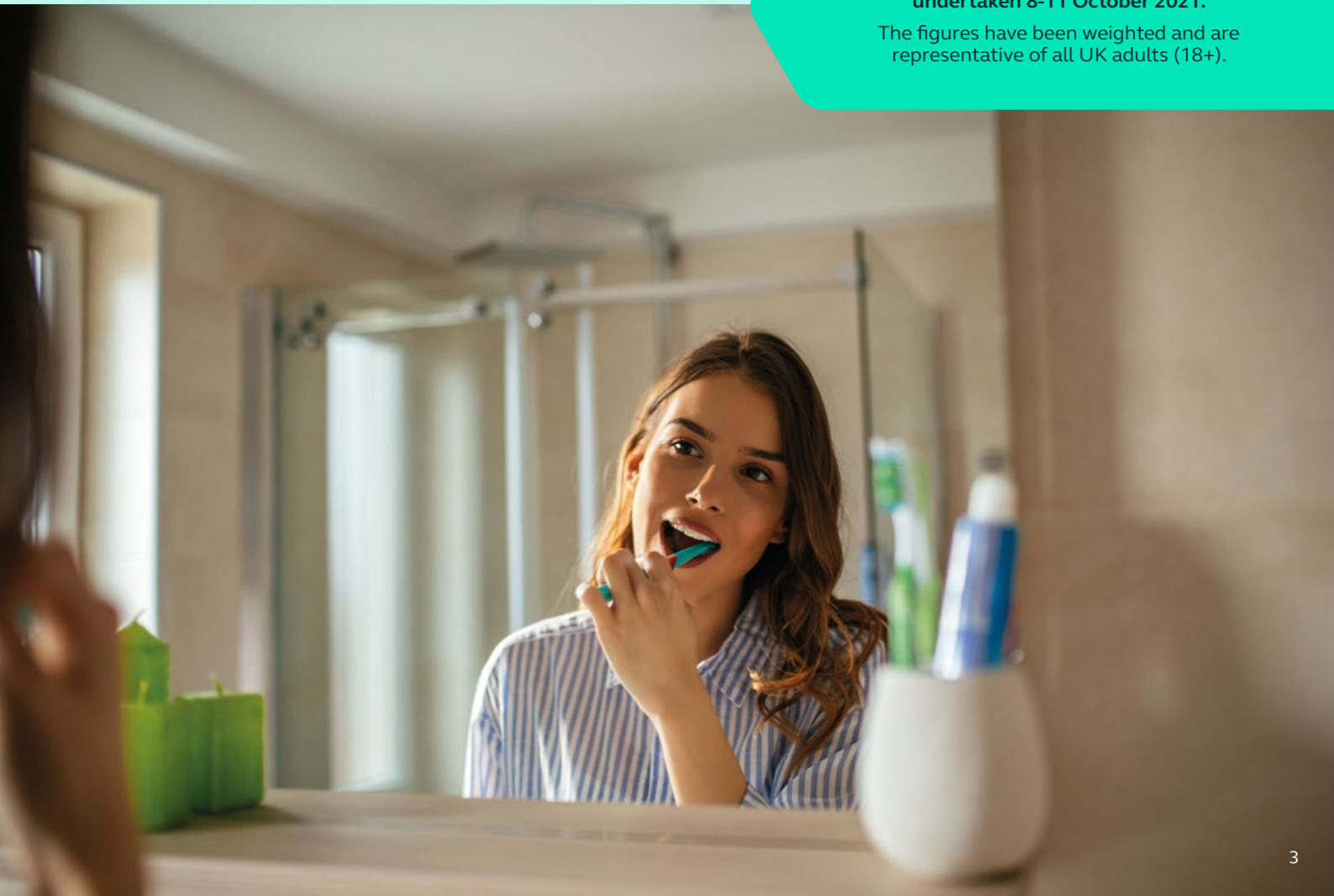
Our research also explores other key factors such as dental attendance, the nation's brushing habits, the impact of oral health on overall health and wellbeing, as well as sugar consumption and children's oral health.

To support the data, we've provided insights from our dental spokesperson and Clinical Director, Dr Catherine Rutland.

If you'd like to know more about the research, or would like a quote from one of our dental experts, please do get in touch.

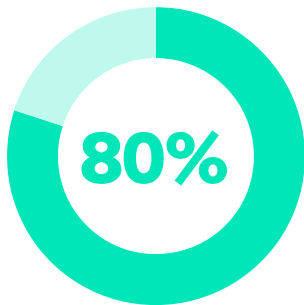
Survey data of 5,060 adults conducted by DeltaPoll on behalf of Simplyhealth, undertaken 8-11 October 2021.

The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (18+).



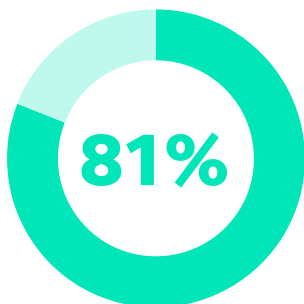
Who goes to the dentist and why?

Regular dental visits are an essential part of maintaining good oral health, and dentists will advise how often a patient should visit according to their individual oral health needs. However, it is recommended everyone should visit their dentist at least once every two years. Our research highlights that this is not always the case though...



80% of adults visited the dentist regularly pre-pandemic (at least once every two years)

While this is a good majority, it does mean that one in five UK adults are missing out on this important health check



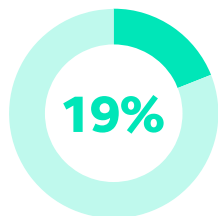
81% of adults on a dental payment plan (such as Denplan) visit every six months

this is nearly double compared to those visiting NHS practices (42%)

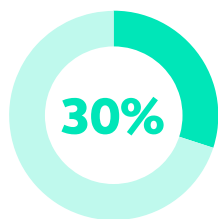




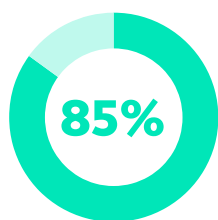
10% of adults only visit the dentist when in pain and 6% of adults never visit the dentist



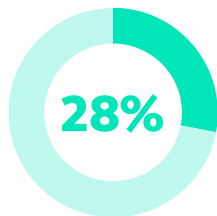
Nearly 1 in 5 adults (19%) have had to take time off work due to dental pain



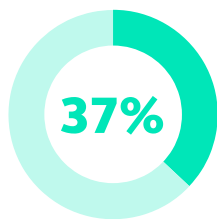
From those who do not visit the dentist regularly for routine check-ups - 30% only go if they need treatment



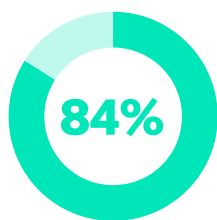
85% agree that the better they look after their teeth and gums, the better chance they have of avoiding costly and invasive dental treatment in the future



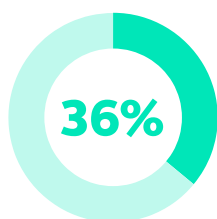
28% of adults never see a hygienist for a scale and polish



37% of adults agree they are scared of the dentist - this is higher in females (42%) and people aged 25-34 (45%)



84% agree regular dental visits play a vital role in maintaining good oral health¹



3 in 5 NHS patients would consider paying for private dental care, with over a third of them (36%) not having been open to this in the past

Adults in the North*

of England attend the dentist most regularly and adults in London are the least regular attenders

*North East, North West and Yorkshire



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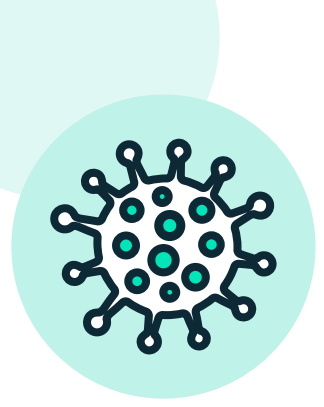
Regular dental visits are important for both your oral health and overall wellbeing. Generally speaking, all adults should ensure that they visit at least once every two years. If you're one of the lucky patients who visits the dentist regularly and is always given a clean bill of health, you could be wondering if you really need to visit so often. The answer is yes.

During a dental examination, your dentist isn't just checking for signs of tooth decay, tooth wear, gum disease and other oral health issues; they're also looking for signs and symptoms of other more serious conditions such as mouth cancer. Increasingly, scientific research is also finding connections between oral health and serious health conditions including diabetes, heart disease, strokes, and dementia - so don't put off that appointment!

Dr Catherine Rutland, Clinical Director, Simplyhealth

¹ This data is from an additional online survey data of 2,008 UK adults (18+) conducted by Research without barriers on behalf of Simplyhealth, undertaken 6-8 October 2021.

Pandemic impact on oral health



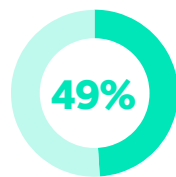
The COVID-19 pandemic had negative consequences for one in three patients, largely but not exclusively because of postponed or delayed dentist appointments. The pandemic has also changed people's financial circumstances and thereby affordability of going to the dentist. More worryingly, further research¹ has shown a change in habits since the pandemic that could affect our oral health more long term.

36% say that the pandemic has negatively impacted their oral health

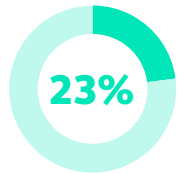
Of the people who feel the pandemic has negatively impacted their oral health:



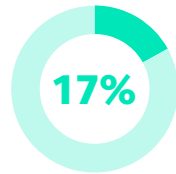
50% have had appointments delayed



49% have been unable to book any dental appointments with their dentist



23% were worried about contracting COVID-19 if attending

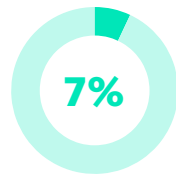


17% say as a result of the pandemic they can no longer afford to go to the dentist, with their financial circumstances changing

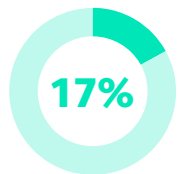
Pandemic habits affecting our oral health



19% of the **36%** who say the pandemic negatively impacted their oral health - say they have been eating more sugary foods during the pandemic



7% of adults said they smoke more, with **2%** having started smoking in the pandemic¹

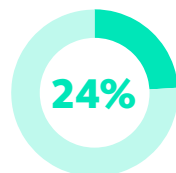


17% drink more alcohol¹

What lies ahead?



29% say in light of the coronavirus, they now value their health and are more likely to visit their dentist as a result¹



24% have missed seeing their dentist in person¹



10% say that their reliance on their dental team has increased¹

¹ This data is from an additional online survey data of 2,008 UK adults (18+) conducted by Research without barriers on behalf of Simplyhealth, undertaken 6-8 October 2021.

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The pandemic continues to have a detrimental impact on our overall health – our oral health included. Seeing that nearly one in three adults say it has negatively impacted their teeth is very worrying. The coronavirus pandemic has exposed – and in many cases exacerbated – the issues facing mixed and private dental practices across the UK. Despite nearly two years of practice teams doing tremendous work in meeting patient care needs and carrying out treatments under challenging circumstances, access is still hard.

Our habits have also been affected, including increased alcohol consumption which is linked to a range of health problems. Most seriously, drinking to excess can increase the risk of mouth cancer by four times. Those who smoke and drink are up to 30 times more likely to develop mouth cancer. In addition, many types of alcohol, such as prosecco, are sugary and acidic which can increase your risk of tooth decay and acid erosion. If you like having a sparkling smile, be aware that red wine and other dark coloured alcoholic drinks and mixers can stain your teeth. If you are having several alcoholic drinks, try to drink a glass of water between each one to stay hydrated and to rinse your mouth.

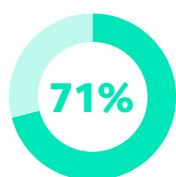
Dr Catherine Rutland, Clinical Director, Simplyhealth



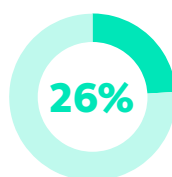
The nation's brushing habits

A good oral health routine is essential for keeping your teeth and gums healthy, and could help you to avoid more complicated dental problems further down the line. Currently, dentists advise that most people should brush their teeth for two minutes, twice a day, as well as cleaning between their teeth daily. However, our research has uncovered that there are some very different oral health habits out there!

How often do we brush our teeth?



71% of adults brush teeth twice a day or more



26% of adults only brush once or less a day – this is higher in men (31%) than women (22%)

Of those that brush their teeth:

51% of adults brush the recommended 2 minutes

27% of adults only brush for 1 minute

5% of adults brush 30 seconds or less

Of those who don't brush their teeth every day:

37% of adults say it's because they often forget

22% of adults say it's because don't think they need to

17% of adults say it's because they find it boring

Did you know?

Rinsing after brushing isn't recommended, yet 74% of adults rinse after brushing

24%

rinse with mouthwash after brushing

39%

rinse with water after brushing

11%

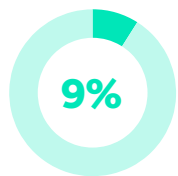
rinse with both



"One of the most common oral health hiccups people make is to rinse their mouth with water after brushing. After you finish brushing, spit the toothpaste out and avoid rinsing your mouth, even with mouthwash. You want to ensure that you keep your teeth coated in toothpaste residue so that the fluoride protects your teeth for as long as possible."

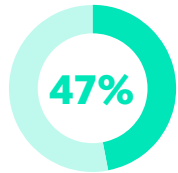
Dr Catherine Rutland, Clinical Director, Simplyhealth

Buying and sharing our toothbrush



9% of adults admit to sharing a toothbrush with another person – rising to 20% in 25-34-year-olds

Of those that brush their teeth:



47% of adults only change their toothbrush every 3 months



25% of adults only change their toothbrush every 6 months

How about cleaning between our teeth?



20% of adults say they never floss*



19% of adults that floss* less than once a day say it's because it's boring.

*Flossing refers to all methods of cleaning between teeth including string floss, floss harps, interdental brushes and air flossers



Our research shows the lack of time and it 'being boring' as key blockers to a good brushing and flossing routine. While time is of the essence to many, you can't put a price on healthy teeth and gums. A proper brushing routine helps to prevent tooth decay and gum disease by removing plaque – the sticky coating of bacteria on your teeth – and food particles. It also helps to freshen breath and lift surface stains. If you don't think you're brushing for the recommended two minutes, many electric toothbrushes have built-in timers to help guide you, or you can download brushing apps that can play two minutes of music through your phone or tablet.

Brushing alone only reaches about 70 per cent of tooth surfaces. If you haven't cleaned interdentally for a while, you may find your gums bleed slightly or are a little tender at first, but this soon goes away with regular flossing so don't let this put you off.

Dr Catherine Rutland, Clinical Director, Simplyhealth

Impact of teeth on confidence and overall health

Our smile impacts much more than our oral health. Our research has revealed the impact oral health has on our confidence and mental wellbeing. One in four adults don't show their teeth when smiling due to self-confidence issues with a further one in seven saying they have low self-esteem because of their teeth.

Increasingly, studies are also finding connections between our oral health and our overall health. Links are now recognised between gum disease and more serious conditions including diabetes, strokes, and heart disease.



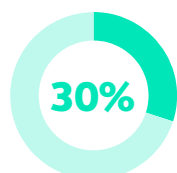
How our smile impacts our self-esteem

- 14%** of adults say they have low confidence issues because of their teeth
- 23%** of adults say they don't like to show their teeth when they smile
- 8%** of adults avoid socialising because of the way their teeth make them feel

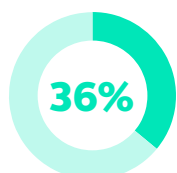
The self-esteem impact is highest in women (17%) versus men (11%) Peaking at age 18-34, where 22% say they have low confidence issues because of their teeth

In the West Midlands 28% of adults say they don't smile because of the way their teeth look, dropping to 20% in the North West.

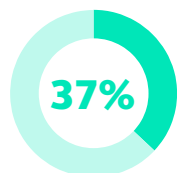
What aspects concern us the most about our oral health?



30% of adults are worried about tooth loss



36% of adults are worried about gum disease



37% of adults are worried about tooth decay



20% of adults are worried about freshness of breath



10% of adults are worried about how their teeth look in photos



Self-confidence has come out as one of the highest issues on how teeth negatively impact our lives in our recent consumer oral health survey. Our smiles are such a huge part of our appearance, and this isn't about cosmetic dental treatment, but goes to show the importance of looking after our teeth in our day-to-day lives. Maintaining good prevention and oral health hygiene overall to protect not only against tooth decay and gum disease, but our feeling and self-consciousness of our appearance overall.

Dr Catherine Rutland, Clinical Director, Simplyhealth



Links between oral health and overall health

75% of adults brush the recommended 2 minutes

Which health conditions do people think can be linked to poor oral health?

- 53%** think it can be linked to mouth cancer
- 17%** think it can be linked to heart disease and heart attacks
- 12%** think it can be linked to diabetes
- 10%** think it can be linked to respiratory disease (e.g. bronchitis, pneumonia etc)
- 6%** think it can be linked to stroke
- 6%** think it can be linked to dementia

Importance of dentists

- 75%** agree that in general, GPs, school nurses and similar health professionals should include oral health as part of general health checks
- 52%** agree that if diagnosed with a serious health condition, they would speak to their dentist about managing oral health implications potentially linked

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Studies are increasingly finding links between oral health and medical conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease and others. It's encouraging that just over half of people know that poor oral health can be linked to an increased risk of mouth cancer, and dental check-ups are crucial for this type of cancer where signs can be detected early.

It's always important to let your dentist know if you have, or if you have had, any serious health conditions. Your dentist can tailor your dental care and recommend an oral health routine to best suit your needs in relation to any conditions you may have. Diabetics, for example, may find they suffer more from oral health issues such as dry mouth, gum disease, and mouth infections – all of which can be managed with the help of your dental practice team.

Dr Catherine Rutland, Clinical Director, Simplyhealth

Children's oral health

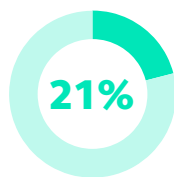
Getting your child off to the right start with their dental care can make all the difference to their future oral health. When asked, 88% of adults said they believe that teaching good oral health habits in childhood is essential for good oral health in life. Our research also revealed some worrying statistics about the oral health impact on the lives of UK children, including nearly one in five having missed school because of oral health problems, and 26% of parents saying their child has had tooth decay.

How often do children (aged 18 or under) visit the dentist for a routine check-up?

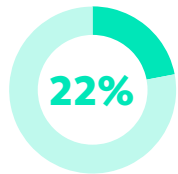
Of those who have children:



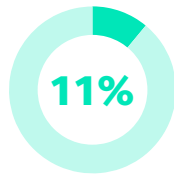
35% said within the last 6 months



21% said within the last 12 months

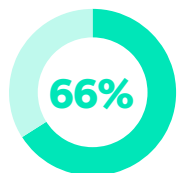


22% said within the last 1-2 years



11% said 3 years or longer

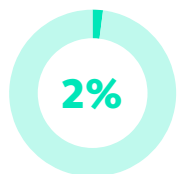
Brushing habits of children



66% of parents say their children brush their teeth twice a day



15% of parents say their children brush their teeth once a day



2% of parents say their children never brush their teeth

Parental supervision of brushing

Of those that have children that brush their teeth:



39% of adults don't supervise their children's tooth brushing

Of those who do supervise the brushing of their children's teeth, respondents claim to stop supervising tooth brushing when the children reach the ages of:

5% of adults stop supervising brushing when their child is 3 years old

12% of adults stop supervising brushing when their child is 4-5 years old

27% of adults stop supervising brushing when their child is 6-8 years old

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While children's teeth are developing, it's important to visit the dentist regularly - ideally every six months, or at least once a year. They can get used to the sights, sounds and smells of a dental practice and get to know the team. Also any dental problems, such as tooth decay, can be more easily spotted and treated early on before they need more invasive treatment. Waiting until your child is a toddler could prove trickier and they may have already developed some dental problems.

Dr Catherine Rutland,
Clinical Director,
Simplyhealth



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As dental professionals we are aware of the worrying state of the oral health of young people in the UK, and strongly reinforce the importance of good diet and oral hygiene habits when families visit for their regular check-ups.

These statistics are really quite shocking. The research shows that more than a quarter of children have had between one and five fillings, and nearly one in five children have missed a full day of school due to tooth decay. Government statistics also show that tooth decay is still the most common reason for hospital admissions in the 6-10 year old age group. Parents and carers can be proactive in looking after their children's oral health by limiting sugar and snacking, and most crucial is a good brushing routine to limit tooth decay.

To help ensure a proper brush in the morning, try getting children to brush their teeth as soon as they wake up. It doesn't matter if you brush before breakfast - in fact, it can help to protect their teeth. Tooth enamel is softer and more vulnerable after eating and drinking sugary and acidic things, and brushing can wear the enamel away. Brushing before breakfast can help to ensure you get the full two minutes in, as well as protecting their tooth enamel.

Dr Catherine Rutland, Clinical Director, Simplyhealth

Oral health impact on the everyday lives of children

Of those that have children:

- 16%** of children have missed school because of oral health problems. This was highest in London (28%)
- 27%** of those whose children took time off school for emergency dental treatment said that their child missed the equivalent of one school day (5-10 hours)

Tooth decay in children

- 26%** of parents asked stated their child/children has had tooth decay
- 47%** of those that had a child with tooth decay say that the tooth was extracted as a result
- 41%** Of those that had a tooth extracted, 41% were hospitalised for their tooth extraction with no general anaesthetic used
- 38%** were hospitalised for their tooth extraction with a general anaesthetic used

Number of cavities in children

Of those adults that answered their child/children has had tooth decay (26%), here are the number of cavities they listed

- 5%** at 3 years old
- 12%** at 4-5 years old
- 27%** at 6-8 years old
- 20%** at 9-10 years old



About Simplyhealth

Since 1872, we've been helping people make the most of life through better everyday health. Our health plans make sure individuals, families and employees can easily access in-person and virtual wellbeing services, and afford to stay healthy by claiming costs back on dental treatments, visits to the optician, complementary therapies and much more.

We're a leading UK health solutions company with almost 1000 colleagues serving 2.3 million customers. We don't have shareholders, so we're led by our Purpose of improving access to healthcare, for the many, for the long term. We're passionate about using our voice in public health affairs and partnering with charities to reduce health inequality – each year we commit to giving 10% of pre-tax profits to a range of community causes. And we ensure our business takes care of the planet too, achieving Carbon Neutral + status in 2021.

To find out more, visit: www.simplyhealth.co.uk





About Dr Catherine Rutland

As Clinical Director for Simplyhealth and Denplan, Dr Catherine Rutland leads on clinical governance, which creates an environment of continuously improving standards. This is hugely important for all healthcare providers, but particularly for small independent dental practices.

Catherine Rutland represents both organisations at stakeholder events and in communications with regulatory, representative and academic bodies, as well as indemnity organisations in healthcare. As part of her dental work she represents the 'voice of private dentistry', bringing the view of Denplan's thousands of member dentists to policy makers. She is also Simplyhealth's dental spokesperson and advisor for all oral health matters.

After qualifying as a dentist from Leeds University in 1992 and securing a House Officer position, Catherine worked as a Senior House Officer in Newcastle before settling into general dental practice. Catherine joined Denplan part-time in 2010 and was promoted to her current position in 2019. She has 19 years' experience as a joint partner in a private dental practice in Berkshire, and completed a Masters in Medical Ethics and Law from King's College London in 2013. She is also a certified member of the Institute of Risk Management and completed a Level 7 Certificate in Leadership Mentoring and Coaching in 2016.

