



# Young People in 2000

*The Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire  
results for 42,073 young people between the ages of 10 and 15*

## **2 Doctor and Dentist**

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# 2 Doctor and Dentist



The 'doctor' questions are about the respondents' last visit to their GP. With respect to dental hygiene, the questions are about toothbrushing frequency, their last visit to the dentist, and the treatment they received.

**Question**

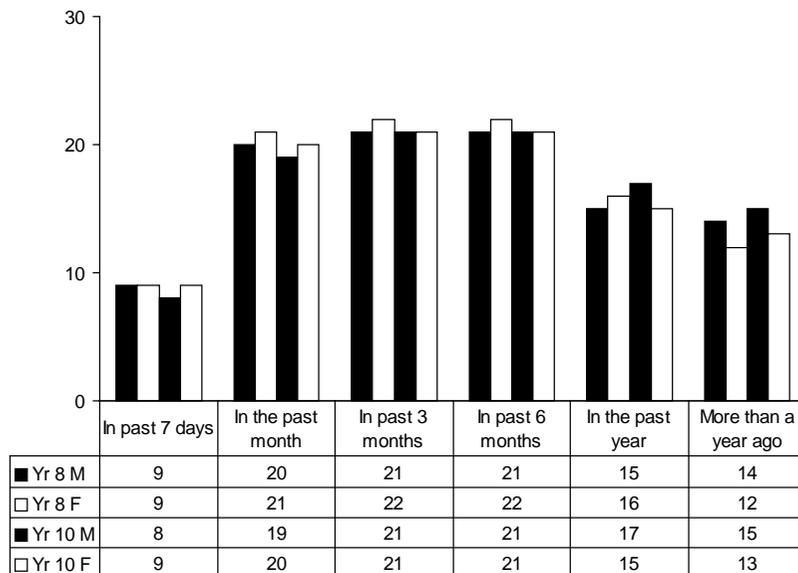
H11	How long ago did you last visit the doctor? .....	14
H12	On this last visit, did you feel at ease with the doctor?.....	15
H3	How many times did you clean your teeth yesterday? .....	16
H4	How long ago did you last visit the dentist? .....	17
H5	What treatment did you receive on your last visit to the dentist? .....	18

# Visiting the doctor

About half had visited the doctor within the past 3 months

## How long ago did you last visit the doctor? (H11)

1. About 50% report having visited their GP within the past 3 months — a figure that rises to over 85% for the past year.
2. There is little age or gender difference, although slightly more males than females report their last visit as more than a year ago.



## Comments

1. Absences from school at the time of the questionnaire survey can selectively affect the responses to some questions. Pupils that are ill, or actually visiting their doctor at the time, could well reduce the percentage recording a recent GP visit.
2. The previously-noted interpretations of a difference in 'health consciousness' between males and females are not much reflected in the frequency of GP visits.
3. Are GPs aware of these perhaps surprisingly high frequencies of attendance? In the introduction, we reported how one GP was so disbelieving of the attendance figures reported locally that he checked his own practice records, and found them consistent with the rates recorded in the survey.
4. There are opportunities for health promotion during these GP visits which could be made better use of, but would GPs, like teachers, groan when told that they have to add a fresh load to their existing burdens?

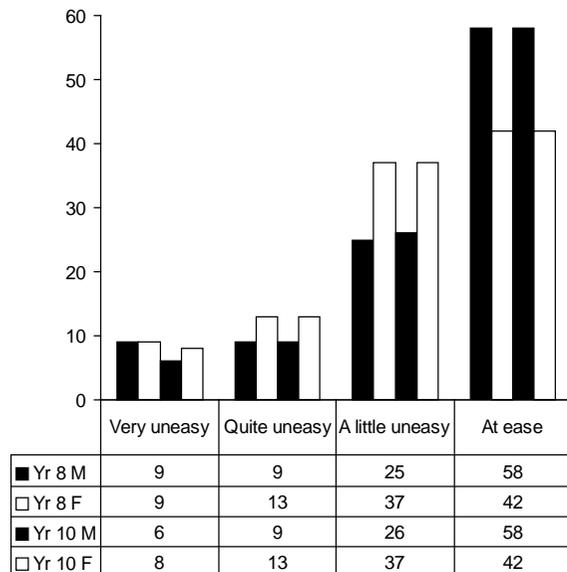
Valid responses	
Yr 8 M (12-13 yrs)	6761
Yr 8 F	7304
Yr 10 M (14-15 yrs)	6827
Yr 10 F	7238

# Talking to the doctor

Fewer females than males are at ease

## On this last visit, did you feel at ease with the doctor? (H12)

1. More males than females felt at ease on their last visit.
2. About 20% of the females felt quite uneasy or very uneasy.
3. There are no obvious age differences apparent.



Valid responses	
Yr 8 M (12-13 yrs)	6614
Yr 8 F	7096
Yr 10 M (14-15 yrs)	6742
Yr 10 F	7148

### Comments

1. This question has been asked since 1981. Earlier surveys recorded the gender of the GP last visited, and suggested that both boys and girls were more likely to be at ease with female doctors, who are of course in the minority.
2. The level of ease with the doctor could reflect general confidence with adults, or concern about the reason for the visit.
3. A less trusting interpretation is that males are less likely to admit to unease.

In *Young People in 1997* we have shown that those young people who say they were at ease with their GP on their last visit were also likely to have visited their GP more recently:

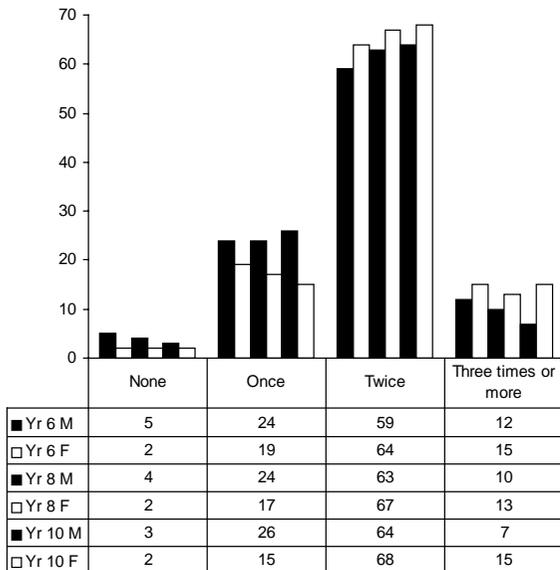
- At ease (whole sample) : 50%
- At ease (visited last week) : 55%
- At ease (visited last year) : 48%

# Cleaning teeth

Nearly 25% of 17,794 males brush only once

## How many times did you clean your teeth yesterday? (H3) (Pri.33)

1. More than 70% of males and at least 80% of females brushed their teeth at least twice.
2. Across the three age groups represented, more girls consistently report brushing their teeth at least twice on the previous day.



Valid responses	
Yr 6 M (10-11 yrs)	6284
Yr 6 F	6248
Yr 8 M (12-13 yrs)	5778
Yr 8 F	6304
Yr 10 M (14-15 yrs)	5732
Yr 10 F	6185

### Comments

1. Twice-daily brushing is recommended, and the majority of young people are achieving this.
2. The females are recording higher average brushing levels than the males, but these may be linked to having their teeth looking nice, and general concern about their appearance, rather than to 'health' issues.
3. Despite the improvement in children's dental health, decay remains a significant problem. This is most often caused by the frequent consumption of foods and drinks containing sugar (DOH, 1989).
4. As well as toothbrushing, the use of floss or other inter-dental cleaning aids can be discussed with young people.



Toothbrushing frequency, as we have demonstrated over the years, is related to several other aspects of lifestyle, including birth order, ease with the opposite sex, region of the country, self-esteem and smoking.

# Visiting the dentist

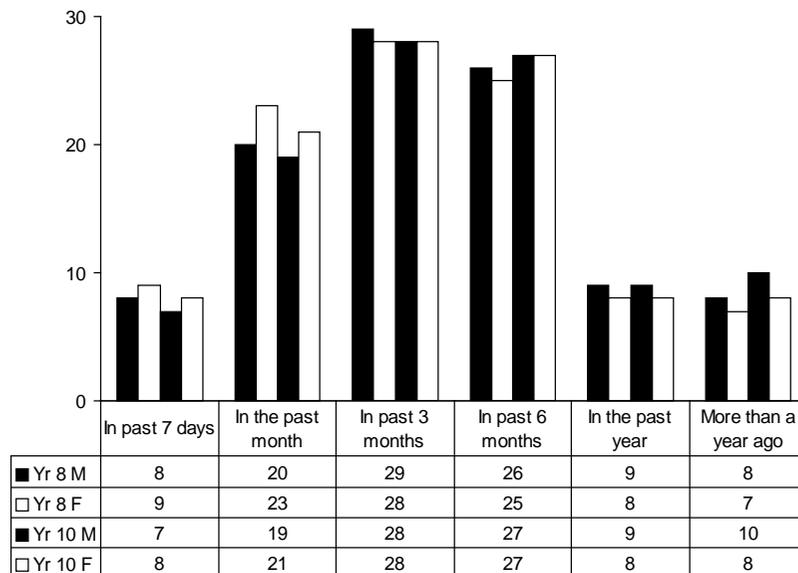
Most had been within the past six months

## How long ago did you last visit the dentist? (H4)

1. About 85% of all the groups state that they have been within the past 6 months, which is the recommended interval.
2. The females' average frequency of visits is slightly higher than the males', and the Year 8 pupils tend to have been a little more recently than those in Year 10.

## Comments

1. The '6-month rule' is only a recommendation, and we are advised has no strictly scientific basis. This doesn't mean it should be ignored!
2. Are the Year 8 respondents better at going to the dentist because they are more biddable, more conscientious, or suffer from more dental problems? Are they more likely to share a 'joint booking' with a parent, at least for the initial check-up?



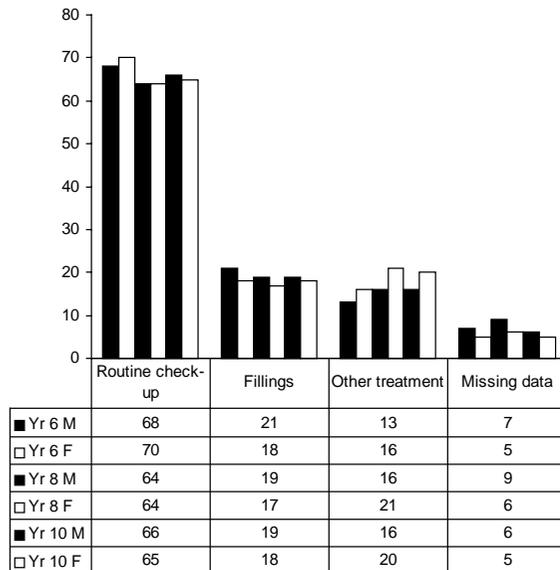
Valid responses	
Yr 8 M (12-13 yrs)	6792
Yr 8 F	7277
Yr 10 M (14-15 yrs)	6804
Yr 10 F	7213

# Dental treatment

For those having fillings there was little gender difference

## What treatment did you receive on your last visit to the dentist? (H5) (Pri.34)

1. The 65% of all groups that reported having a checkup could include those with no problems as well as those commencing a new course of treatment.
2. Of the 35% that presumably were on an existing course of treatment, over half had fillings.
3. The other treatments reported by 20% of the respondents could have included extractions, the fitting or adjustment of a brace, or descaling and polishing.



Available sample	
Yr 6 M (10-11 yrs)	6511
Yr 6 F	6391
Yr 8 M (12-13 yrs)	7180
Yr 8 F	7548
Yr 10 M (14-15 yrs)	7034
Yr 10 F	7409

## Comments

1. Changes in the accessibility or pricing of NHS dentistry should not have affected school pupils directly, for whom treatment is free under 18 years of age.
2. Schools concerned about dental disease should ensure that policies about food availability in school address the need to reduce the consumption of sugary and acidic foods and drinks among children, for example, when considering meals, snacks, tuck shops, vending machines and so on.



A link between the consumption of sugary fizzy drinks and dental treatment can readily be demonstrated:

Frequency of consumption of fizzy drinks	Percentage having fillings on last visit to dentist	N
Rarely or never	16%	3519
Once a week or less	15%	5916
2-3 days a week	18%	7912
<b>On most days</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>10599</b>

While the link can be shown, we cannot say from these data alone that the consumption of fizzy drinks is a cause of the dental decay. Each may be separately related to some other factor, like social class.