

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 and their last visit to the dentist.

Question

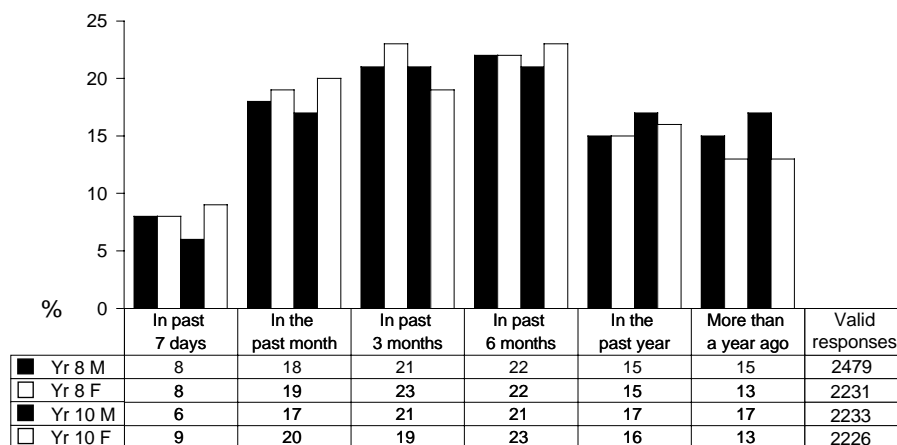
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Visiting the doctor

About half had visited the doctor within *the past 3 months*

How long ago did you last visit the doctor?

- Up to 29% visited within *the past month*. About 50% report having visited their GP within *the past 3 months*.
- There is little age or gender difference, although slightly more older females (29%) report going to their GP in the past month compared with the older males (23%).



Comments

- Are GPs aware of these perhaps surprisingly high frequencies of attendance? In the 'Introduction' (page xxv), 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.
- Are the numbers going up or down? Since 1999 the percentage of those visiting the doctor in the past month are:

Visit GP in past month	1999 %	2000 %	2001 %	2002 %	2003 %	2004 %	2005 %
Yr 8 Male	26	29	27	25	27	25	25
Yr 8 Female	28	30	28	27	26	28	27
Yr 10 Male	26	27	26	24	21	23	23
Yr 10 Female	31	29	29	29	29	30	29

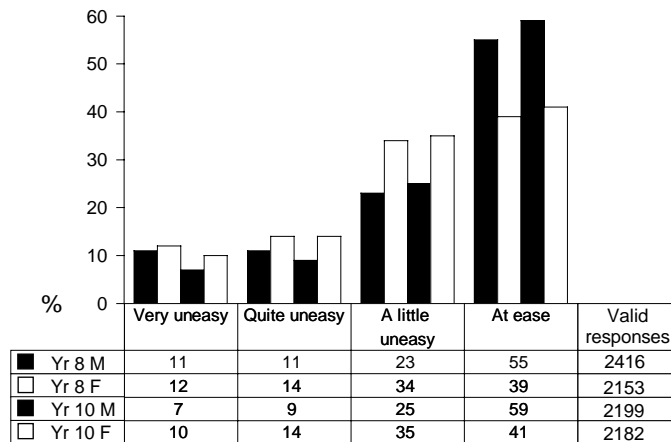
Gender and age differences are generally consistent and females have usually been visiting more frequently than males. The differences are small with the exception of older pupils since 2003.

Talking to the doctor

Up to 26% of the females felt *quite uneasy* or *very uneasy*

On this last visit, did you feel at ease with the doctor?

1. More males than females felt *at ease* on their last visit.
2. Up to 26% of the females felt *quite uneasy* or *very uneasy* with the younger females reporting higher figures.
3. As they get older, young people feel more at ease talking to the doctor.



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%
- (visited last year) : 48%

Cleaning teeth

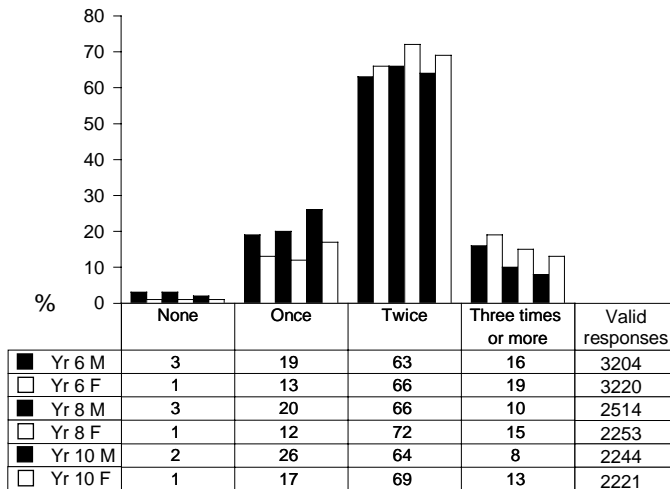
Up to 26% of the males brush *only once*

How many times did you clean your teeth yesterday?

1. More than 72% of males and at least 82% of females brushed their teeth at least twice.
2. Up to 26% of the males brush only once.
3. Across the three age groups represented, more girls consistently report brushing their teeth at least twice on the previous day.

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 three months

How long ago did you last visit the dentist?

- Over 80% of all the groups state that they have been within the past 6 months, which is the recommended interval.
- 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

- 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!
- 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?
- 1 in 10 dentists are reported to be leaving the NHS (April 2006 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4908250.stm>) and patients are finding it harder to find a dentist. This may have an impact on future figures of visits to the dentist.

