

Many Australians with missing teeth don't need dentures

December 1 2014, by David Ellis

(Medical Xpress)—The latest research from the University of Adelaide challenges current thinking on whether many people with tooth loss really need dentures.

The findings have major implications for public dental health resources and costs for patients.

Studies conducted by the University's Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health (ARCPOH) in the School of Dentistry have found that people with [tooth loss](#) do not have their quality of life interfered with provided they still have a certain number and type of [teeth](#) left.

In dentistry terms, these patients are considered to have "shortened dental arches", enabling them to maintain functional use of many teeth. The researchers say there is a cutting off point at which tooth loss interferes with quality of life, but patients only need dentures when they reach that cutting off point.

The study, based on data of more than 2700 people, is to be published in a future issue of the journal *Community Dentistry and Oral Epidemiology*. The researchers say as many as 434,000 Australians who currently would be considered for dentures at some stage in their lives may not really need them.

"For years it has been taken for granted that if people experience tooth

loss, they will need dentures, bridges, implants or other corrective processes to replace the missing teeth," says lead author Dr Haiping Tan.

"What we've found is that it really depends on the position of the teeth that have been lost, as well as the number. Most people have 28 adult teeth, plus the four [wisdom teeth](#), but it is possible to have significantly less teeth as long as people have them in the right positions and in the right numbers.

"It's about getting the right balance of biting and cutting teeth at the front of the mouth with enough of the chewing teeth at the back - that can make a real difference to people's dental function," she says.

Study co-author Professor Marco Peres, also from the University's School of Dentistry, says the findings are significant both for patients and the dental health system.

"For the public health sector, this work raises the question of how to allocate resources, especially if many people are currently receiving [dentures](#) or other corrective procedures when they may not need to do so," Professor Peres says.

"These resources could instead be allocated to the prevention of further tooth loss, diagnostic services and follow up for the patient, rather than prosthetic procedures," he says.

More information: "Do people with shortened dental arches have worse oral health-related quality of life than those with more natural teeth? A population-based study." *Community Dent Oral Epidemiol* 2014. DOI: 10.1111/cdoe.12124

Provided by University of Adelaide

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