

Better dental care needed for people living with MS

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Physical symptoms of MS can affect personal oral hygiene. Credit: University of Queensland

Many Australians living with multiple sclerosis (MS) do not receive adequate oral health care or access to dental services.

These are the findings of a new study led by UQ School of Dentistry researcher Dr Kelsey Pateman.

Dr Pateman explored the [oral health](#) behaviours and dental care experiences of people living with MS.

"The oral health needs of people living with MS have been under-researched," Dr Pateman said.

"Our study found that, for many people living with MS, accessing dental care can be very complicated and inequities in access may lead to poorer oral health outcomes.

"These patients often experience difficulties such as lack of transport to-and-from dental appointments, space limitations in the dental surgery, and financial barriers to receiving care."

Globally, more than 2.3 million people are living with MS, including more than 23,000 in Australia.

Participants in Dr Pateman's study found dental care to be inflexible and not tailored to their individual needs.

"The physical symptoms of MS can affect personal oral hygiene," Dr Pateman said.

"Changes to dental health can be caused by the progression of the disease or by medications taken to manage the symptoms.

"It is important for dental professionals to offer tailored and individualised [dental care](#) when treating people living with MS.

"We now need to look at [oral health education](#) that includes altered strategies for performing daily oral hygiene, and advice regarding suitable diets for patients with swallowing difficulties.

"Future research should focus on enhancing access through transport, infrastructure changes, reducing the cost of dental services, and providing at-home oral health care."

This study has formed the background evidence for an Australian-wide survey currently being conducted as part of the Australian Multiple Sclerosis Longitudinal Study.

Dr Pateman's research was published in Community Dentistry and Oral Epidemiology.

More information: K. Pateman et al. How do Australians living with MS experience oral health and accessing dental care? A focus group study, *Community Dentistry and Oral Epidemiology* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/cdoe.12263](https://doi.org/10.1111/cdoe.12263)

Provided by University of Queensland

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