

Reduction in dental care and inferior oral health subsequent to dementia diagnosis

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Subsequent to a diagnosis of dementia, the patient's contact with the dental care services diminishes and oral health is impaired. This has been revealed by a major register-based study from Karolinska Institutet published in the scientific journal *Alzheimer's & Dementia*.

Researchers at Karolinska Institutet, using register data, have examined utilisation of dental [health](#) services and [oral health](#) among a large number of individuals before and after a [dementia diagnosis](#). Information on diagnoses and cognitive function has been compiled for around 58,000 persons registered in the Swedish Dementia Registry, SveDem, from 2007 to 2015. Information relating to dental health was obtained from Tandhälsoregistret (dental health registry).

"We observed that the number of visits to dentists saw a dramatic decrease after a dementia diagnosis and that the reduction in utilisation of dental health services was more predominant with patients who experienced a more rapid degeneration in cognitive function," explains Maria Eriksson, Professor of Geriatrics at the Department of Neurobiology, Care Sciences and Society, Karolinska Institutet.

A low MMSE score (Mini-Mental State Examination) – a method used to indicate cognitive impairment – represented a risk factor in terms of losing teeth. Poor oral health, tooth decay and loosening of teeth may cause pain, reduced quality of life and difficulties eating, resulting in poor nutrition.

"It may be the case that patients forget to visit the dentist or put other types of health care first, as dental care is separate from other medical services. We require better organisation to detect these patients and ensure that they attend their [dental health](#) check-ups," says Gunilla Sandborgh Englund, Professor at the Department of Dental Medicine, Karolinska Institutet.

More information: Seyed-Mohammad Fereshtehnejad et al. Dental care utilization in patients with different types of dementia: A longitudinal nationwide study of 58,037 individuals, *Alzheimer's & Dementia* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jalz.2017.05.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jalz.2017.05.004)

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