

Benefits of oral hygiene can drive university students in Japan toward dental check-ups

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In Japan, the frequency at which university students undergo oral health

check-ups is reportedly much lower than that of the overall population. This is a cause of concern because frequent oral health check-ups are directly linked to good oral hygiene. Interestingly, this might be related to risk aversion, which in simple terms, is the tendency to prefer certainty over uncertainty. Naturally, individuals with high-risk aversion tend to adopt more healthy behaviors. However, it is not known how risk aversion influences university students' willingness to undergo oral health check-ups.

Recently, a team of researchers led by Dr. Ichiro Sumita from the Department of Preventive Dentistry, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmaceutical Sciences at Okayama University, Japan, including Dr. Naoki Toyama, Dr. Daisuke Ekuni, and Dr. Manabu Morita, explored the causes underlying this discrepancy. The findings of their study were published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, on October 26, 2022. "Since the number of young people who undergo dental check-ups is low in Japan, we conducted a study on their willingness to undergo dental check-ups," says Dr. Sumita.

This was a survey-based study, conducted through the cooperation of 748 students from Okayama University, who underwent oral examinations in April, 2020. The survey questionnaire recorded basic details such as age and sex, in addition to specific information about the respondents' oral hygiene behaviors. This included the frequency at which they brushed their teeth, their opinions on the Rosenstock's health belief model, i.e., a model that assesses people's readiness to improve their health, their tendency to avoid potential medical calamities, and their willingness to show up for a regular dental check-up.

The team hypothesized that the students' responses to the health belief model and tendencies towards absolute risk-aversion influenced their oral health and hygiene behaviors. The main objective of the study was to clarify and quantify these associations statistically, so that necessary

measures could be taken to improve oral health across the population.

Findings from the study suggested that the willingness of the students to undergo regular check-ups was strongly associated with their thoughts regarding the health-belief model, and oral health behaviors. For instance, some students were afraid that if they do not undergo a dental health check-up, the risk of developing a dental disease will persist. Second, some students were found to use interdental brushes or [dental floss](#), routinely.

The students' willingness to undergo regular dental check-ups was not associated with absolute risk aversion. The team inferred that the "perceived benefit" of undergoing regular check-ups was more likely to push [young students](#) towards opting for these check-ups, as compared to their stance on risk-aversion.

Interestingly, previous studies have reported that the fear of dental injections prevent individuals from underdoing dental check-ups, leading to overall poor oral health and inefficient utilization of dental care facilities.

The team believes that while this is the first comprehensive study of its kind to assess all possible factors that affect the willingness of individuals to voluntarily get themselves checked, the scope of the study is racially limited. Moreover, the results are exclusive to the behaviors of young adults who were a part of the study population.

In conclusion, while the researchers agree that the results of the study could not be used to bring about any immediate changes in the system, the insights received and their long-term applications are indeed valuable to designing public [health](#) strategies in the future. "Through these findings, we are hopeful that it might be possible to influence students to undergo check-ups voluntarily. Eventually, the number of people

undergoing regular dental check-ups will increase, and dental diseases will be detected and treated at early stages," says Dr. Sumita.

More information: Ichiro Sumita et al, The Impact of Oral Health Behaviors, Health Belief Model, and Absolute Risk Aversion on the Willingness of Japanese University Students to Undergo Regular Dental Check-Ups: A Cross-Sectional Study, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph192113920](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192113920)

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