

Why is Good Oral Health So Important for Older Adults?

Whatever a person's age, it is important to keep the mouth clean, healthy and feeling good.

A healthy mouth has:

- NO Pain and soreness
- NO Bleeding and redness of the gums
- NO Large holes in the teeth
- NO Food trapped in between teeth

A healthy mouth allows a person to:

- Speak clearly and with ease
- Chew well for proper nutrition
- Smile and feel good about themselves
- Reduce risk of other health problems

Lack of proper daily oral care allows harmful bacteria to build up, and this can lead to cavities and gum diseases (Periodontitis/Pyorrhea, Gingivitis).

Gum Disease May Increase the Risk of:

- Diabetes
- Heart disease & Stroke
- Pneumonia & other lung conditions
- Osteoporosis
- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Prosthetic Joint Infections

Medications and Dry Mouth

Older adults are likely to take medications that can impact their oral health. Many common medications (antihistamines, diuretics, pain killers, high blood pressure pills and antidepressants) can cause side effects such as soft tissue changes, taste changes, gingival overgrowth, and dry mouth.

A dry mouth does not have enough saliva to wash away food and neutralize plaque, and is more susceptible to tooth decay and gum disease. In addition, dry mouth can cause sore throat, problems with speaking, difficulty swallowing and hoarseness. A dentist can recommend various methods to restore moisture.



Resources

American Dental Association	www.ada.org
American Dental Hygienists Association	www.adha.org
American Academy of Periodontology	www.perio.org
Proctor & Gamble	www.dentalcare.com
Geriatric Dental Group	www.geriatricdental.org
NIH Senior Health	www.nihseniorhealth.gov
Healthy Aging for Older Adults	www.cdc.gov/aging
National Institute on Aging	www.nia.nih.gov
National Council on the Aging	www.ncoa.org
Administration on Aging	www.aoa.gov
US Government Medicare	www.medicare.gov
Oregon Geriatric Education Center	www.ohsu.edu/ogec
Oregon Department of Human Services	www.oregon.gov/DHS



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Care Guide: Health & Wellness in the Mouth



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Proper Flossing and Brushing

Flossing daily removes plaque and food particles between teeth and below the gumline. Gums may be sore or bleed for the first several days of flossing. If bleeding continues after the first week of flossing, call a dental professional. If handling floss is awkward, ask the dentist about floss holders or other types of interdental cleaning aids.

- Wrap an 18-inch strand around the middle fingers and hold a one-inch section tightly.
- Ease floss between teeth. Clean up and down several times while curving around teeth at the gumline.
- Unwind and use a clean section of floss as needed. Always floss behind the last tooth.
- Floss around the crowns of a bridge and under artificial teeth using a floss threader.

Proper brushing helps minimize the risk of tooth decay and gum disease, the major causes of tooth loss. Brush after each meal, or at least twice a day. Use a soft-bristle brush and an ADA-accepted fluoride toothpaste to remove plaque and food particles. Replace brushes every three months.

- On outer and inner surfaces, brush at a 45-degree angle in short, half-tooth-wide strokes against the gumline.
- On chewing surfaces, hold the brush flat and brush back and forth.
- On inside surfaces of front teeth, tilt brush vertically and use gentle up and down strokes with toe of brush.
- Brush the tongue in a back-to-front sweeping motion to remove food particles and freshen your mouth.

Pay special attention to cleaning teeth that fit under a denture's metal clasps. Plaque trapped under clasps can increase the risk of tooth decay.

Even if no natural teeth remain, it is still necessary to take good care of the mouth. Brush the gums, tongue and palate every morning with a soft-

bristled brush before inserting dentures. This stimulates circulation in the tissues and helps remove plaque.

Denture wearers should still have regular oral examinations from a dentist. The mouth and oral tissues are subject to many serious diseases and should be examined on a routine basis. A dentist can recommend the frequency of checkups. During the visit, the dentist will examine the mouth to see if the dentures continue to fit and determine if adjustments are needed. The dentist also examines the mouth for signs of oral disease such as cancer. Regular examinations and having your teeth professionally cleaned are vital for maintaining a healthy smile.

Caring for Dentures

Like natural teeth, dentures must be properly cared for if they are to last. Daily brushing will remove food deposits and plaque and helps prevent the artificial teeth from becoming permanently stained. While it is best to use a brush made specifically for cleaning dentures, a toothbrush with soft bristles can also be used. Avoid hard-bristled brushes that can damage dentures.

Some denture wearers use hand soap or mild dishwashing liquid, which are both acceptable for cleaning dentures. Avoid other powdered household cleaners, however, which may be too abrasive. To clean the denture, rinse off loose food particles. Moisten the brush and apply the cleanser. Gently brush every surface to avoid damage.

Don't let dentures dry out or they might lose their shape. When not being worn, place them in a denture cleanser soaking solution or in plain water. Never soak dentures in hot water, which can cause them to warp. Look for denture soaking solutions that display the ADA's Seal of Acceptance, a symbol of safety and effectiveness.

Dentures require careful handling. They are very delicate and may break even if dropped just a few inches. When handling dentures, stand over a folded towel or a sink filled with water. If they are accidentally dropped, this would help cushion it from breaking.

See a dentist if dentures break, crack, chip or if any of the teeth become loose. A dentist should be the only one to make adjustments and repairs. A person who lacks the proper training will not be able to repair a denture. Don't be tempted to try and adjust them. This can cause greater damage to the denture and may cause oral health problems. Over-the-counter glues often contain harmful chemicals and will be ineffective at adequately repairing the denture.

Over time, a denture may become loose and will not fit properly. This is due to normal wear and natural changes of the mouth with age. Jaws may align differently as bones and gum ridges recede or shrink. Denture clasps may also become loose from normal wear. Anything that affects the precise fit of dentures may cause irritation, possible sores, or infection. Furthermore, a loose denture makes chewing difficult and can change the facial features. While a denture adhesive can temporarily aid a loose-fitting denture, prolonged use of adhesives is not recommended. It is important to see a dentist to replace worn or poorly fitting dentures before they cause problems.

**DEMAND PROPER CARE AND
KEEP SMILES HEALTHY!**

