



Dental Care for the Elderly

Older Americans make up a growing percentage of the population. As we continue to live longer, the need for proper oral care is vital to maintain natural teeth and enhance the quality of life. Currently, over 60 percent of the U.S. population over the age of 65 have some or all of their natural teeth.

Many people think that toothaches, tooth loss and dry mouth happen naturally as you grow old. The truth is, most of these conditions result from diseases of the teeth such as periodontal disease and dental caries or medication side effects. We can all keep our teeth longer by maintaining good oral health.

What problems most affect the dental health of the elderly?

- Limits on insurance and money to afford dental treatment
- Inability to get to dental offices
- Shortage of dentists trained and willing to see the elderly
- Side effects of medications
- Recurrent decay around older fillings
- Decay at the gum line where gums have receded
- Gum disease
- Oral cancers
- Poor diet
- Lack of appreciation of oral health

What can I do to maintain my oral health?

- Drink water and use toothpastes and rinses that have fluoride in them.
- Brush at least twice a day and floss daily.
- Get an electric toothbrush and flosser or use handles or other adaptations to make brushing and flossing easier.
- See a dentist regularly.
- Don't smoke or use smokeless tobacco products.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.
- Check for side effects of medicines and report them to your doctor/dentist.
- Make sure to get dental care before having surgery or treatment that may affect your oral health.
- Caregivers should learn how to take care of the teeth of those who are not able to take care of their own teeth.
- Any changes in dental health and overall health should be reported to both your dentist and primary care doctor.

Healthy Teeth, Healthy Life!