



Dental Care for Older Adults

Maintaining a Healthy Smile Throughout Life

Why Oral Health Changes with Age

Growing older does not necessarily mean losing your teeth. Today, many older adults keep most or all of their natural teeth throughout their lives. However, aging can increase the risk of certain oral health conditions that require regular preventive care and professional attention.

Good oral health supports nutrition, speech, comfort, social confidence, and overall quality of life.

Common Oral Health Changes in Older Adults

As people age, they may experience:

- Dry mouth
- Gum recession
- Root cavities
- Tooth wear
- Tooth sensitivity
- Difficulty cleaning around restorations
- Tooth loss
- Oral cancer
- Changes related to medications or chronic diseases

Many of these conditions can be prevented or managed with routine dental care.

Dry Mouth

Dry mouth (xerostomia) is one of the most common oral health concerns among older adults.

It is often caused by:

- Prescription medications
- Medical conditions
- Radiation therapy
- Reduced saliva production

Dry mouth increases the risk of:

- Cavities
- Oral infections
- Difficulty swallowing
- Difficulty wearing dentures
- Bad breath

Drinking water regularly and discussing treatment options with your dentist can help relieve symptoms.

Gum Recession

Over time, gums may gradually recede, exposing the roots of the teeth.

Unlike the crowns of teeth, roots are not protected by enamel.

Exposed roots are more vulnerable to:

- Tooth sensitivity
- Root cavities
- Tooth wear

Gentle brushing and regular dental care help protect exposed root surfaces.

Root Cavities

Root cavities become more common with age because exposed root surfaces are softer than enamel.

The risk increases with:

- Dry mouth

- Poor oral hygiene
- Frequent sugar consumption
- Gum recession

Fluoride toothpaste and regular dental visits help reduce this risk.

Tooth Wear

Years of chewing may gradually wear down the teeth.

Additional wear may result from:

- Teeth grinding (bruxism)
- Acid erosion
- Aggressive brushing

Excessive wear may increase tooth sensitivity and the risk of fractures.

Oral Cancer Screening

The risk of oral cancer increases with age, especially among people who:

- Use tobacco
- Drink alcohol heavily
- Have a history of prolonged sun exposure affecting the lips

Routine dental examinations include screening for abnormal tissues that may require further evaluation.

Early detection greatly improves treatment outcomes.

Dentures and Dental Implants

Many older adults wear:

- Partial dentures
- Complete dentures

- Dental implants

These restorations require regular professional evaluation to ensure they continue fitting properly and functioning well.

Even people without natural teeth should continue routine dental visits.

Medications and Oral Health

Many medications may affect the mouth.

Possible side effects include:

- Dry mouth
- Changes in taste
- Gum enlargement
- Increased risk of oral infections

Always provide your dentist with an up-to-date list of medications.

Nutrition and Oral Health

A balanced diet supports healthy teeth and gums.

Older adults should aim to consume:

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Whole grains
- Lean proteins
- Dairy or other calcium-rich foods

If chewing becomes difficult, speak with your dentist before avoiding healthy foods.

Many dental problems can be treated to improve chewing comfort.

Daily Oral Care

Older adults should continue to:

- Brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between the teeth every day.
- Brush the tongue.
- Drink water regularly.
- Clean dentures every day if worn.
- Replace toothbrushes every 3–4 months.

Good daily oral hygiene remains the most effective way to prevent oral disease.

How Often Should Older Adults Visit the Dentist?

Many older adults benefit from regular dental examinations approximately every six months.

However, more frequent visits may be recommended for individuals with:

- Gum disease
- Dry mouth
- Diabetes
- Dental implants
- Multiple restorations
- Increased risk of cavities

Your dentist will recommend a schedule based on your individual needs.

Common Myths

"Losing teeth is a normal part of aging."

False.

Many people keep their natural teeth for life with proper preventive care.

"If I wear dentures, I no longer need dental visits."

False.

Regular examinations remain important for evaluating dentures, oral tissues, and screening for oral cancer.

"Dry mouth is just part of getting older."

Not entirely.

Dry mouth is more commonly related to medications and medical conditions than to aging itself.

Treatment is often available.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Healthy aging includes maintaining good oral health.
 - ✓ Dry mouth, gum recession, and root cavities become more common with age.
 - ✓ Daily brushing, flossing, and regular dental visits remain essential.
 - ✓ Dentures and dental implants require ongoing professional care.
 - ✓ Oral cancer screening is an important part of routine dental examinations.
 - ✓ Most tooth loss can be prevented with good preventive care and early treatment.
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