



# Oral Health After Age 60

## How to Maintain Healthy Teeth and Gums as You Age

### Why Does Oral Health Change with Age?

Growing older does not mean you will lose your teeth. In fact, many adults keep their natural teeth for a lifetime with proper care.

However, aging, certain medical conditions, and medications can increase the risk of oral health problems. Understanding these changes can help you maintain a healthy smile and a good quality of life.

Healthy teeth and gums support proper nutrition, clear speech, confidence, and overall well-being.

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## Common Oral Health Changes After Age 60

As people age, they may become more likely to experience:

- Dry mouth
- Gum recession
- Root cavities
- Tooth wear
- Gum disease
- Tooth loss
- Difficulty cleaning around dental restorations
- Oral cancer

These conditions are **not** inevitable but become more common with age.

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## Dry Mouth

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

It is often caused by:

- Prescription medications
- Certain medical conditions
- Radiation therapy to the head and neck
- Autoimmune diseases

Because saliva protects the teeth, dry mouth increases the risk of:

- Cavities
- Oral infections
- Difficulty chewing and swallowing
- Bad breath

Drinking water regularly and discussing treatment options with your dentist or physician may help relieve symptoms.

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## Gum Disease

The risk of **periodontal (gum) disease** increases with age.

Signs include:

- Bleeding gums
- Swollen gums
- Receding gums
- Loose teeth
- Persistent bad breath

Untreated gum disease remains the leading cause of tooth loss in adults.

Regular dental visits help identify and treat gum disease early.

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## Root Cavities

As gums naturally recede over time, the tooth roots may become exposed.

Unlike enamel, root surfaces are covered by **cementum**, which is softer and more vulnerable to decay.

Root cavities may develop more quickly than cavities on the crown of the tooth.

Daily fluoride use and regular dental care help reduce this risk.

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## **Tooth Wear**

Years of chewing, grinding, and normal use may gradually wear down the teeth.

Common causes include:

- Bruxism (teeth grinding)
- Acidic foods and beverages
- Natural aging
- Improper brushing technique

Your dentist can recommend treatments to protect worn teeth when necessary.

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## **Caring for Dental Restorations**

Many older adults have:

- Fillings
- Crowns
- Bridges
- Dental implants
- Dentures

These restorations require regular cleaning and maintenance.

Even restored teeth can develop new cavities or gum disease if plaque is not removed effectively.

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## **Nutrition and Oral Health**

Healthy eating remains important throughout life.

Choose foods rich in:

- Calcium
- Vitamin D
- Protein
- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Whole grains

Limiting sugary foods and beverages helps reduce the risk of tooth decay.

If chewing becomes difficult, speak with your dentist before making major dietary changes.

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## Oral Cancer Screening

The risk of **oral cancer** increases with age.

Risk factors include:

- Tobacco use
- Heavy alcohol consumption
- Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection
- Excessive sun exposure to the lips

Regular dental examinations include screening for abnormal changes that may require further evaluation.

Early detection greatly improves treatment outcomes.

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## Denture Care

If you wear dentures:

- Remove them at night unless instructed otherwise.
- Clean them every day.
- Brush your gums and tongue.
- Visit your dentist regularly to check the fit.

Poorly fitting dentures may cause sore spots, difficulty eating, and oral infections.

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# Keeping Your Natural Teeth

Most adults can keep their natural teeth for life by:

- Brushing twice daily with fluoride toothpaste.
- Cleaning between the teeth every day.
- Drinking water regularly.
- Limiting sugary foods and drinks.
- Avoiding tobacco products.
- Visiting the dentist regularly.

Preventive care remains effective at every age.

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## When Should You See a Dentist?

Schedule a dental appointment if you notice:

- Persistent dry mouth
- Bleeding gums
- Loose teeth
- Difficulty chewing
- Mouth sores lasting more than **two weeks**
- Changes in dentures or bite
- Tooth sensitivity or pain

Early treatment often prevents more serious problems.

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## Common Myths

**"Losing teeth is a normal part of aging."**

**False.**

With proper preventive care and regular dental visits, many people keep their natural teeth throughout life.

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**"If I wear dentures, I don't need to see a dentist."**

**False.**

People with dentures still need regular oral examinations to monitor the gums, oral tissues, and the fit of the dentures.

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**"Dry mouth is just part of getting older."**

**False.**

Dry mouth is often related to medications or medical conditions and can often be managed with appropriate treatment.

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## Key Takeaways

- ✓ Healthy natural teeth can often last a lifetime with proper care.
  - ✓ Older adults are more likely to experience dry mouth, gum disease, root cavities, and tooth wear.
  - ✓ Regular dental visits remain important, even for people with dentures.
  - ✓ Good oral hygiene, fluoride, healthy nutrition, and tobacco avoidance help protect oral health after age 60.
  - ✓ Oral cancer screening becomes increasingly important with age.
  - ✓ Early recognition and treatment of oral health problems support overall health and quality of life.
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## References

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