

Keeping seniors smiling

Maintaining good oral health is vital to ensuring our overall health and wellbeing. Healthy teeth and gums enable us to continue eating the wide variety of foods we need.

Lack of preventive dental care can lead to problems ranging from nutritional deficiencies to communication problems to debilitating diseases.

Careful attention to your dental health and hygiene will keep you smiling. Follow your hygiene plan and visit your dentist or hygienist for regular check-ups.

Common oral conditions in senior patients, and how they can be prevented or treated

- Dental cavities, especially on the root surfaces

Can be prevented by improving bacterial plaque control, using fluoride (contained in certain toothpastes, rinses and gels) and cutting back on sugary foods. Using an electric toothbrush, such as the Braun Oral B Plaque Remover, is advisable.

- Gum disease-the single leading cause of adult tooth loss

Can be prevented by meticulous bacterial plaque removal, using antibacterial rinses and toothpastes, and maintaining a healthy, well-balanced diet to boost the immune system.

- Oral cancer

Can be combated by early recognition, treatment and preventive procedures, such as giving up smoking and reducing alcohol consumption and sun exposure.

- Dental stomatitis-irritation of the tissue under a denture

Best prevented by removing the dentures at night, and placing in a sterile solution, such as Milton's Bleach or Steradent. Brush the gum under the denture, and rinse with Savacol or warm, salty water. (Refer to the denture care brochure for more details.)

- Dry mouth

Often due to medications, smoking, caffeine, illness and dehydration. Can be treated by altering medication (consult your doctor) or using saliva stimulating or artificial saliva substances, such as Biotene toothpaste, rinse or moisturising gel (available from your chemist).

- Erosion of the teeth

Often due to acid, this can be easily prevented by avoiding or reducing sugary or acidic food or drink. It is advisable to rinse rather than brush after consuming sugary or acidic food or drink.

- Sensitivity resulting from worn enamel or receding gum tissue

Brush gently with a soft toothbrush and a toothpaste for sensitive teeth.

Consequences of oral disease

- The same bacteria that cause dental cavities and gum disease can infect other tissue in the mouth.

- These bacteria can enter the bloodstream and infect tissue throughout the body. They can enter the lower airways and

cause aspiration pneumonia.

- These bacteria can cause brain abscesses, disease of the heart valves, joint infections and fever. Dental disease caused by bacteria has recently been identified as a risk factor for stroke.

See also ...

- Personal dental hygiene plan
- Your Smile Dental Hygienist
- Sugar & your smile
- Avoiding acid erosion
- Preventing gum disease
- Dentures