

Seniors - Age Brings Changes In Dental Care Treatment

It's an indisputable fact - our bodies change as we get older and so does our need for dentistry. These changes take different forms in different people, depending on our inherited physical traits, our lifestyle and nutritional habits, and our medical conditions.

Age brings changes in oral health and your need for dental care, too. There are some specific areas where seniors need to pay close attention to protect and extend their oral health.

- **Tooth Color:** Plaque is an invisible layer of bacteria that forms on our teeth, and can trap stains at any age. But as we get older, plaque builds up more quickly and is harder to remove. At the same time, the tissue that lies underneath the tooth enamel, called "dentin," is changing, and those changes can make teeth appear darker. Finally, decades of consuming coffee, tea, or tobacco leave stains that build up over time.

Daily brushing and flossing are important, particularly first thing in the morning and just before bed, to combat the plaque that builds up overnight. You may also want to consult your dentist about using commercial rinses that remove plaque.

- **Dry Mouth:** Many seniors experience a reduced flow of saliva, sometimes as a side effect of medications such as painkillers or decongestants. For some, the lack of moisture inside the mouth can lead to sore throats, a burning sensation, hoarseness, or difficulty swallowing. In addition, if you leave dry mouth unattended, it can damage teeth, since saliva's natural rinsing action keeps bacteria washed away from teeth and gums. Sugar-free chewing gum and hard candy will stimulate natural saliva flow and oral rinses will provide much-needed relief. Ask us which commercial products are the best recommendations for you.
- **Cavities:** If your gums begin to recede, the portion of the tooth that used to be below the gum line is now exposed. Roots are softer than tooth surfaces hence they are susceptible to decay; they are also more likely to be sensitive to hot and cold. Most people over age 50 suffer from some form of dental concern. Make sure you take good care of your teeth and gums with daily brushing and flossing. A word of caution: your gums may be starting to thin. Brush thoroughly but gently to keep from damaging your gums.
- **Fillings:** Your fillings are getting older, too. They can weaken or crack, or your tooth may decay around the edges of the filling. As a result, bacteria can seep into your tooth, causing more decay. Regular check-ups will give your dentist the chance to keep an eye on your existing fillings.

- Gum Disease: Daily cleaning and good nutrition are critical for healthy gums. When gums become infected and diseased, they set off a chain reaction that can result in losing teeth or weakening the jawbone. Either condition creates more problems for your health and increases your medical costs. Contact our office if your gums become red or begin to bleed.
- Good Nutrition: What you put into your mouth has a direct impact on the health of your mouth -- and the health of the rest of your body. As you age and your lifestyle changes, keep your nutritional goals in mind. Balanced meals are one the best ways you can contribute to your own good health.
- Regular Exams: The dentist will check your mouth, teeth, and jaw for any problems. You should also mention any sores, swelling, or pain you might be experiencing. Regular checkups enable the dentist to spot problems early. Early resolution of problems will help you keep your natural teeth.

Good dental care, regular check-ups, and good nutrition are the keys to really keep you smiling in your golden years!

Courtesy of the Ontario Dental Association