

# ORAL HEALTH FOR SENIORS

## How Do I Maintain Good Oral Health?

Your teeth can last a lifetime with proper home care and regular dental checkups. No matter what your age, you can keep your teeth and gums healthy by brushing twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, flossing daily and seeing your dentist regularly for professional cleanings and checkups.



## What Special Oral Health Issues Should I Know About?

Even if you brush and floss regularly, you may face certain issues in your senior years when it comes to your oral health. Wearing dentures, taking medications and general health conditions are some of the issues many seniors face. Luckily, your dentist and physician can help you meet most of these challenges quite successfully.

- Cavities and decay on the root surfaces of the teeth are more common in older adults. So it's important to brush with a fluoride toothpaste, floss daily and see your dentist regularly.
- Sensitivity can be an increasing problem as one ages. Your gums naturally recede over time, exposing areas of the tooth that are not protected by enamel. These areas are particularly prone to pain due to cold or hot foods or beverages. In severe cases cold air, as well as sensitivity to sour and sweet drinks and foods, can occur. If you experience sensitivity, try an anti-sensitivity toothpaste. If the problem persists, see your dentist, as the sensitivity may be an indication of a more serious condition, such as a cavity or a cracked or fractured tooth.
- Dry mouth is a common condition in seniors, and one that may be caused by medications or certain medical disorders. Left untreated, dry mouth can damage your teeth. Your dentist can recommend various methods to restore moisture in your mouth, as well as appropriate treatments or medications to help prevent the problems associated with dry mouth.
- Existing health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, or cancer, can affect your oral health. Be sure to let your dentist know of any general health issues you're facing, so that he or she understands the whole situation and can help you meet your special requirements.
- Dentures can make life easier for many seniors, but they require special care. Follow your dentist's instructions carefully and see your dentist if any problems arise. An annual checkup is recommended for long-term denture wearers.
- Gum disease is a potentially serious condition that can affect people of all ages, but especially people over 40. A number of factors can increase the severity of gum disease, including:
  - Bad diet
  - Poor oral hygiene
  - Systemic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer.
  - Environmental factors such as: stress and smoking
  - Certain medications that can influence gum condition

**Tip sheet provided by HealthLink Dental Clinic, a free dental clinic for low-income, working adults and veterans living in Bucks and Montgomery Counties. For more information, call us at (215) 364-4247 or visit us online at**

**[www.healthlinkdental.org](http://www.healthlinkdental.org)**