

Adults over 60 can face unique challenges when it comes to keeping their teeth and gums healthy. About 3 in 5 adults over 65 have gum disease, and nearly 1 in 7 have lost all of their teeth.

Getting older doesn't have to mean losing your teeth. This brochure talks about some of the reasons for increased risk of complications and some steps you can take to keep your mouth healthy.

In this brochure:

- Adults over 60 can face unique oral health challenges
- Tooth decay and gum disease are common in older adults
- Regular dental visits can lower your risk for tooth decay or loss, gum disease and oral cancer

ADA Healthy Smile Tips

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between your teeth daily.
- Eat a healthy diet that limits sugary beverages and snacks.
- See your dentist regularly for prevention and treatment of oral disease.

For more information about taking care of your mouth and teeth, visit MouthHealthy.org, the ADA's website just for patients.



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Oral Health for Adults over 60



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America's leading advocate for oral health

Possible Dental Problems for Older Adults

Dental care is important for everyone. There are several dental issues that are especially common in older adults. These problems can affect people of all ages, but older adults should take special care to avoid them. Some common dental issues for older adults are:

- **Tooth decay.** Tooth decay is the destruction of tooth **enamel (e-NAM-uhl)**, the hard outer surface of your teeth. Acid produced by the bacteria on your teeth attacks the enamel and it begins to break down. This causes tooth decay. Tooth decay can also lead to tooth sensitivity and difficulty chewing.
- **Gum disease.** Gum disease, also known as **periodontal (perry-o-DON-tal)** disease, is an infection that affects the tissue and bone that support your teeth. Gum disease can be painless, but that doesn't mean it's not doing damage. Advanced gum disease may cause your teeth to become loose or fall out.
- **Tooth loss.** One of the most common causes of tooth loss is gum disease. Loss of teeth can lead to cosmetic issues and difficulty chewing and malnutrition.
- **Oral cancer.** The risk of oral cancer, or mouth cancer, increases with age. It can be more common in people over the age of 50. Your dentist will check for oral cancer at each visit. Signs you should watch for include mouth sores that don't go away, red or white patches, lumps or rough spots, and changes in the way dentures fit. Be sure to tell your dentist if you notice any changes in your mouth.

Possible Causes of Dental Problems in Older Adults

There are many possible causes for dental issues. Some common causes that affect older adults are:

- **Dry mouth from medication.** Prescription medications often can cause dry mouth. Saliva is an important part of dental health. Drying irritates the soft tissues in your mouth, which can make them sore and lead to infections. Without good saliva flow to keep your mouth clean, tooth decay and oral infections can become much more common.
- **Certain medical conditions such as diabetes.** Gum disease may be more frequent and more severe in older adults with diabetes, especially if they smoke or they have poor blood sugar control. Adults with diabetes also are more likely to lose teeth as a result of gum disease. If you have diabetes, it is important to maintain good blood sugar control, eat a healthy diet and keep up with daily oral care.
- **Conditions like osteoporosis or arthritis** can make it harder to brush or floss regularly, which increases the risk for gum disease. If you have hand, arm or shoulder problems that limit movement, a powered toothbrush may be easier for you to use.

Your oral health is an important part of your overall health, so see your dentist regularly and keep him or her informed of your overall health status.

Prevention and Treatment

You can avoid many of these issues by maintaining good oral health at home.

- Make sure that you brush your teeth twice a day for two minutes each time, and floss daily.



- Use a toothpaste that contains fluoride, and drink fluoridated water, if available.
- See your dentist regularly for prevention and treatment of oral disease.
- Make sure to tell your dentist about your overall health and what medications you are taking.
- Avoid tobacco in any form. Tobacco, including cigarettes and chewing tobacco, can increase your risk for gum disease and oral cancer.
- Let your doctor know about any medications you are taking. If one or more of your medications is causing dry mouth, your dentist can recommend ways to increase saliva flow. This may include sipping on water throughout the day, sucking on ice chips or sugar-free candy, or keeping the air in your home moist with a humidifier.

