

Build healthy oral habits that last a lifetime

Oral health and aging: What you should know



It's possible to have healthy teeth that last a lifetime, and there are things you can do to help you achieve that.

Get two dental check-ups per year

It's recommended to get two dental check-ups per year, no matter how old you are. However, as you get older, the nerves in your teeth can get smaller, which makes it more difficult to feel cavities and gum disease.¹ For this reason, dental check-ups become increasingly important because your dentist can catch oral issues you may otherwise not be aware of. They can catch issues early on, while they're still small and easier to treat.

Tell your dentist what medications you're taking²

Older adults may use several prescription and over-the-counter medications. Some of these medications can cause dry mouth. Drink tap water, which often has fluoride to help strengthen your teeth, but also ask your dentist what other remedies may help.

Brush twice a day for two minutes

Always brush your teeth twice a day for two minutes with a fluoride toothpaste. Following the American Dental Association's (ADA's) guideline helps reduce cavity-causing plaque and lowers your risk of gum disease. Unfortunately, most people only brush for about 45 seconds.³ But, by brushing for two full minutes, you can remove more plaque. Remember to replace your toothbrush every three to four months too – fresh bristles clean more effectively. An electric toothbrush is another great option, especially if you have problems holding things with your hands.

1. American Dental Association (ADA). "Aging and Dental Health." Mouth Healthy. www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/a/aging-and-dental-health. 2. ADA. "Adults over 60: Concerns." Mouth Healthy. www.mouthhealthy.org/en/adults-over-60/concerns. 3. ADA. "8 Bad Brushing Habits to Break in 2021." Mouth Healthy. <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/brushing-mistakes-slideshow>. 4. Higuera, Valencia. (2019, December 16). "Is It Best to Floss Before or After Brushing Your Teeth?" Healthline. www.healthline.com/health/dental-and-oral-health/floss-before-or-after-brushing.

Denture care

If you wear full or partial dentures, make sure to clean them daily and remove them at night while you sleep. To clean your dentures, start by brushing them with warm water with a brush specifically for denture cleaning to reach the nooks and crannies and to remove all of the soft buildup. Don't use toothpaste to brush. Then before you go to bed, place the dentures in a cleansing solution to soak overnight. This is important to prevent the dentures from drying out. Any over-the-counter denture solution that carries the ADA Seal of Acceptance is safe to use.

Floss once a day

Gum disease (periodontitis) is common among older populations, and flossing is an important way to reduce your risk. Floss before you brush so you can remove any food, bacteria and plaque and then effectively clear it away.⁴

Caring for a loved one who's elderly or disabled?¹

Follow the above tips for daily oral health care and regular visits to the dentist. It also helps to find a dentist who specializes in caring for elderly and disabled communities. Visit myCigna.com if you need help finding a dentist.

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