

# Saving senior smiles:

## *The importance of oral health*

**G**ood news for seniors! Oral health among U.S. seniors has never been better, according to a recent report by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Among seniors aged 65 years and older, the percentage of complete tooth loss decreased from 34 percent to 27 percent.



To help maintain a healthy smile in the golden years, it's important to be aware of specific dental issues that may affect seniors:

- Dental decay is more common among older adults, which is why it is especially important to brush at least twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, particularly at bedtime.
- Some medications or medical conditions can cause dry mouth as a result of a lack of saliva. Saliva has anti-bacterial properties and helps protect against tooth decay. Drinking water, chewing sugarless gum, and sucking on sugarless candy can help restore moisture. A dentist can also recommend mouth rinses or artificial saliva.
- The incidence of gum disease (Periodontitis) is greater among older adults; symptoms may include bleeding, tender or swollen gums, loose teeth and bad breath. Regular flossing, combined with daily brushing, can help minimize or prevent this from happening.
- Receding gums can result in the root of the tooth being exposed and susceptible to decay. Using fluoride toothpaste and mouth rinses can help prevent or reduce cavities on root surfaces.
- The use of tobacco and alcohol can cause tooth-related problems, mask gum inflammation, and increase the risk of developing oral cancer. It's never too late to quit and reduce these risks.

In addition, good dental hygiene habits, such as regular brushing, flossing, and visits to the dentist, can help seniors maintain their oral health and avoid the above conditions. A daily effort to keep your mouth clean can help keep your smile healthy!

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