

DENTAL CARE FOR THE OLDER ADULT

You are never too old to have healthy teeth and gums. Taking care of your teeth is just as important now as it was when you were younger. Making the choice to take care of your teeth and gums at home every day will make a big difference in your health and how you feel. Learn how to protect your smile.

1. Does the health of my mouth affect the health of my body?

Yes, studies show that keeping your teeth and gums healthy may lower the risk of heart and lung disease. It can also affect the control of your blood sugars if you have diabetes. Gum disease and tooth decay are infections caused by bacteria which can spread through the blood to affect other parts of the body. Gum disease may increase your risk for heart disease by 1 to 3 times. You can breathe mouth bacteria into the lungs and increase the risk for pneumonia. Problems in the mouth can affect your total health and wellness. When was your last visit to the dentist? Good daily mouth care and regular visits to the dentist are a great way to stay healthy.

2. How often should I visit my dentist or dental hygienist?

If it has been longer than one year since you have seen a dentist or dental hygienist, please give them a call today. Your dentist and dental hygienist can tell you how often you need check ups and cleanings.

Bring a list of the following to your dental check-up:

- Medical history and allergies
- Medicines you take including vitamins and over the counter products
- Doctors' names and phone numbers
- Dentist's or denturist's name and phone number
- Dentures and/or partials, even if you don't wear them
- Emergency contact name and phone number
- Dental plan information: private or Dental and Optical Assistance for Seniors Program.

3. How can I keep my teeth for the rest of my life?

- Brush your teeth, gums and tongue morning and night for 2 minutes with a soft-bristle toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between your teeth with floss. If you can not use floss ask your Dental Hygienist about oral care tools that you may use to clean the plaque germs from between the teeth.
- If you are not able to move your shoulders, arms and hands talk to a dental hygienist or occupational therapist for ideas on how to hold your toothbrush and cleaners for in between the teeth.
- If you are a smoker, you should think about quitting. Tobacco causes problems with gum disease, loss of teeth, tooth decay and healing after dental work. Talk to the dental staff about products that can help you quit smoking.

4. I wear dentures, how often should I visit the dentist?

A visit to the dentist includes a mouth cancer exam. Even if you wear dentures, you should have your denture checked for fit and your mouth checked for cancer or other mouth problems. Remember to brush your dentures after meals and to leave them out overnight for the health of your mouth under your denture.

5. Am I at risk of getting mouth cancer? What are the signs of mouth cancer?

Lumps, bumps or open sores with color changes of white, red, purple or black in your mouth, with or without pain, could be signs of mouth cancer. These changes could be on your lips, tongue or any where inside your mouth. You should call your dentist if any of these signs last longer than 14 days. Have your mouth checked at least once a year.

6. I have dry mouth, what mouth products should I use?

Over 800 medicines may cause dry mouth. If you are taking medicine for high blood pressure, cholesterol, pain, anxiety or depression, allergies or asthma, seizures, Parkinson's or Alzheimer's diseases then you may have a problem with a dry mouth. Talk to your dentist or family doctor if you have a dry mouth to find out the cause for your dry mouth and to talk about over-the-counter toothpastes, mouth rinses, and mouth-moisture gels and sprays that may help with the dry mouth and lips.

7. I am over 65 years old; do I have coverage for dental care?

The Dental and Optical Assistance for Seniors Programs provides a basic dental plan. It may cover up to \$5,000 every 5 years. The amount you might receive is based on your yearly income.

If you have applied for the Alberta Seniors Benefit program, you are already signed up for the dental and optical plan. You do not need to apply again. If you have any questions about the program, please visit www.seniors.alberta.ca or call 1-800-642-3853.

8. Where can I find more information?

To find out more information, contact your dentist. You could speak to a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Call Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free. Mandarin Health Link Calgary 403-943-1554, Cantonese Health Link Calgary 403-943-1556.

Source: Community Oral Health Program, Alberta Health Services, Calgary Zone

If you want to read any of the previous 'Road To Healthy Living' series articles, please go to http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/diversity/multilingual_health_services.htm and get health information in your own language