

### How can I keep a healthy mouth?



Visit the dentist regularly even if you only have dentures. It is especially important to attend for a dental check up before starting any medication for bone density problems.



Brush your teeth and gums at least twice a day for two minutes especially before you sleep.



Remove and clean any dentures daily.

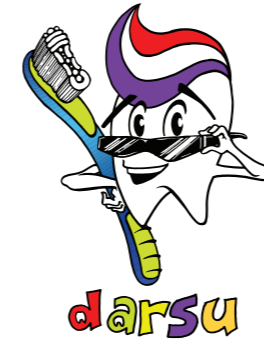


Always carry an updated list of the medications you are taking.

#### Contact your dentist if you notice:

- any changes in your mouth
- loose or sensitive teeth
- difficulty in tasting, chewing or swallowing
- any discomfort, sores or bleeding
- lumps or swellings

Information compiled by **Dental Public Health Unit**



### Teeth for life

Information guide for maintaining good oral health

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OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER  
MINISTRY FOR HEALTH

#teeth for life

# Dental Care for the Older Adult



MOUTH HEALTH

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As we **get older**, changes occur in our mouth and body. However, loss of teeth is not a natural part of getting older. Good oral health is an essential part of general health. Lack of good care of our mouth might also contribute to cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stroke and respiratory diseases.



**The most common oral health problems associated with older adults are:**

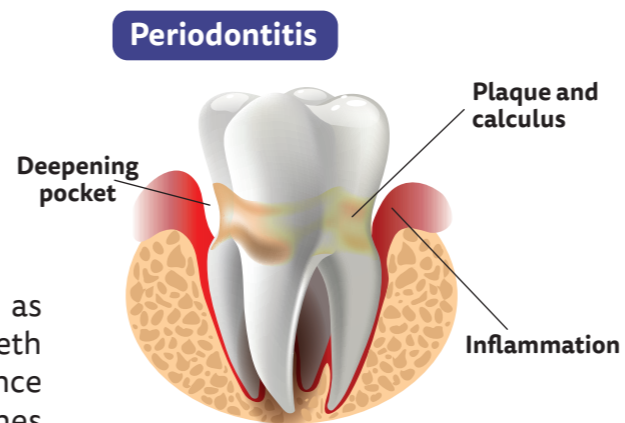
- Gum disease
- Root decay and hypersensitivity
- Dry mouth
- Oral infections
- Tooth discolouration
- Altered taste

**Even older adults can enjoy a healthy mouth**

**Gum disease (Periodontal disease)**

Gum disease is caused by inadequate oral hygiene and plaque (bacteria) build-up. It is the major cause of tooth loss in adults. Smoking, unhealthy diets, ill-fitting dentures, and medical conditions like diabetes and anaemia increase the risk of gum disease.

Reduced hand mobility due to conditions such as arthritis, may make brushing or flossing of teeth difficult. Toothbrush adaptors can be used to enhance grip and facilitate brushing. Alternatively superbrushes (which brush all the tooth surfaces at the same time) or electric toothbrushes can be used.



**Root decay and hypersensitivity**

As the gums begin to recede in older adults, tooth roots become exposed. This makes teeth more sensitive and more prone to decay. Treatment recommendations include the use of fluoride mouthwashes and toothpastes for sensitive teeth.

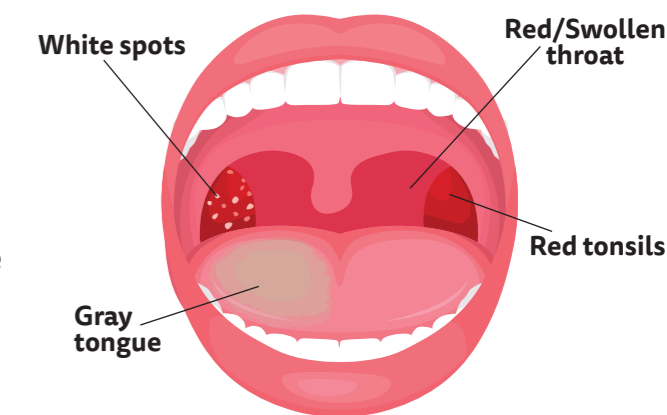


**Dry mouth (Xerostomia)**

This occurs for a number of reasons, the most common being medications taken and radiation treatments. A dry mouth increases the risk of tooth decay. If your mouth is dry, sip water frequently and use non-foaming toothpaste or toothpaste especially intended for dry mouth. Chewing sugar-free gum helps stimulate salivary flow. Saliva substitutes are also available.

**Oral infections**

Oral infections in the mouth are commonly found in older adults. They are brought about by poor oral hygiene, unclean or ill-fitting dentures and conditions like diabetes. These appear as white or red patches in the mouth and can cause pain and irritation.



**Altered Taste**

The sense of taste declines with age as taste buds degenerate. Medications, smoking, a dry mouth and dentures all contribute to changes in taste.

**Tooth discolouration**

Older adults may notice that their teeth have darkened. This may be due to age-related changes in the tooth and a lifetime of consuming stain-inducing foods and drinks like coffee and tea.