



MOUTH CHANGES WITH AGE

As we get older we may notice changes in our mouths. It is natural to wonder “is this normal or is something wrong with me?” Let’s review some common questions and discover the truth as to what you can expect as you age.

Isn’t tooth loss inevitable in my later years?

No! Today, older adults are keeping their natural teeth longer because of scientific developments and the preventive emphasis in dentistry. This improvement was seen in the results of a survey released by the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. They showed that among persons aged 55 to 64, the rate of toothlessness dropped 60 percent since 1960. Good oral hygiene and regular dental care are important throughout your life, whatever your age. By practicing good oral hygiene at home and visiting your dentist regularly, you will prevent dental problems and save time and money as well. In the process, you can save your teeth and gums.

Should adults be concerned about cavities?

Tooth decay is not just a child’s problem. Adults of all ages can have cavities too. The causes for tooth decay are the same for everyone, regardless of age. Decay results when the bacteria in plaque feed on the carbohydrates (sugar and starch) in our diet to produce acids that can cause cavities.

Yet, the nature of the decay problem does change somewhat as people grows older. Adults are more likely to have decay around older fillings, and because many adults grew up with out the benefits of fluoride, they may have many more fillings. Decay of the tooth root is also common among older adults. Root caries (decay) occur when the gums recede, exposing the softer root surface, which decays more easily than tooth enamel.

Tooth decay is also promoted by dry mouth. This condition – called xerostomia – occurs when the supply of saliva is greatly reduced. It can be caused by many types of medications (such as anti-histamines, anti-hypertensives, and anti-depressants) or radiation therapy to the head or neck. Saliva is needed to lubricate the mouth, wash foods away and neutralize the acids produced by plaque. Allowed to continue, dry mouth can lead to rampant tooth decay. If you think you have this problem, be sure to discuss it with your dentist. Your dentist may recommend artificial saliva and fluoride products to help prevent decay.

Why do my teeth seem darker?

One of the changes you may notice as you grow older is that it's harder to keep your teeth clean and white. This is because the sticky, colorless layer of bacteria, called plaque, can build up faster and in greater amounts as we age. Changes in dentin, the bone-like tissue that is under your enamel, may also cause your teeth to appear slightly darker.

Why does my mouth feel dry?

Reduced saliva flow that results in a dry mouth is a common problem among older adults. It is caused by certain medical disorders and is often a side effect of medications such as decongestant, painkillers, and diuretics. Some of the common problems associated with dry mouth include a constant sore throat, burning sensation, problems speaking, difficulty swallowing, hoarseness or dry nasal passages and tooth decay!

Why am I losing my sense of taste?

You may find that you are losing your appetite due to a change in your sense of taste. Several factors can cause this change. Besides an age-related decrease in the sense of taste and smell, certain diseases, medications and dentures can contribute to a decrease in your taste.

I am currently taking medication that my physician prescribed for me. Can this affect my dental treatment?

When your dentist asks for your medical history, be sure to provide complete, up-to-date information on your health. Inform your dentist if you have experienced recent hospitalization or surgery, or if you have recently been ill. Also tell your dentist the names, doses and frequency of any medications you are taking- whether prescription or over-the-counter products- and the name of your physician. Inform your dentist of any changes in your health or medications. This information will help your dentist to select the most safe and effective method of treatment for you.

With the proper information and working together with your dentist, you can enjoy the most that life has to offer no matter how old you are!

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