

The Aging Process and Dental Care

The Oral Connection

“Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey understands that my dentist can help me smile into retirement and beyond.”



Age is one of many factors that can affect your smile.

Due to advances in technology and general health awareness, people are living longer and maintaining their teeth for a longer period of time. However, as you advance in years, it can be more difficult to sustain a natural and healthy smile.

As you age, the amount of saliva in your mouth is reduced, making your mouth, teeth and gums more susceptible to cavities and periodontal disease. If left untreated, dry mouth can lead to tooth loss and other problems, including gum and bone recession, bad breath and brittle teeth. Many medications can also reduce saliva production, so older patients need to tell their dentist if they suffer from dry mouth.

People age 55 to 74 have higher rates of periodontal disease. Elderly patients' immune systems are not as strong as their younger counterparts making dental problems like periodontal disease harder to manage. Seeing your dentist regularly can improve your chances of early detection of periodontal disease.

Dr. Eric Shapia, general dentist and spokesperson for the Academy of General Dentistry, says the most common condition he sees in aging adults is periodontal disease and the inability to open the mouth wide enough for oral exams or brushing. He attributes this to

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arthritis, a joint condition that affects many older adults. Limited movement can affect the quality of brushing and care your teeth receive.

Technology in oral health, such as electric toothbrushes, dental implants and fluoride treatments, can preserve teeth for those who suffer from arthritis or tooth loss due to decay or periodontal disease.

Tell your dentist about any health problems and medications you are taking to assure the most appropriate dental treatments.

See your dentist at the first signs of change:

- **Pain.**
- **Tenderness or numbness.**
- **Gums that bleed easily or are red and swollen.**
- **A swelling, lump, thickening or rough spot.**
- **Crust or small-eroded area anywhere in or around the mouth or neck.**
- **White or red patches in the mouth or on the lips.**
- **A sore that bleeds easily or does not heal.**
- **A change in the way your teeth fit together.**
- **Difficulty in chewing, swallowing, speaking or moving the jaw or tongue.**

**Be sure to visit your dentist regularly ...
it could improve the quality of your life.**

Sources: Academy of General Dentistry, www.agd.org;
American Dental Association, www.ada.org.



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