



SENIOR HEALTH

Dental Care

TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR SMILE

Preventive dental care is necessary to keep aging teeth, dentures and gums healthy.

DAILY CARE

Brushing

Brushing after each meal removes plaque (disease-causing bacteria) that forms on your teeth. Gently brush your teeth in circular and back and forth strokes with a soft-bristle brush and fluoride toothpaste after each meal. If you have limited shoulder or hand movement due to arthritis or other disorders, try lengthening or widening the brush handle or attach it to your hand with an elastic band. Electric toothbrushes can also be helpful. See your dentist for suggestions.

Flossing

Dental floss used every day removes the plaque between your teeth where your toothbrush can't reach.

Denture Care

Full or partial dentures require the same hygiene care as teeth. Food deposits and plaque can cause bad breath, permanent staining and gum irritation. Every day, brush all surfaces of your dentures with a denture care product. At night, soak your dentures in water or a denture cleansing liquid. Rinsing with a warm saltwater solution in the morning, at bedtime and after meals is also helpful. It's also important to have your dentures checked once a year for proper fit and wear.

MOUTHWASHES

Antibacterial or antiplaque mouthwashes are now available. For best results, they should be used in addition to regular brushing, flossing and dental checkups.



TOOTH DECAY AND GUM DISEASE

Gums that aren't brushed and flossed can easily become diseased, causing them to recede and possibly causing tooth loss. Gum disease is caused by a buildup of plaque around the teeth. Some medications may cause dry mouth and reduce saliva, which can lead to tooth decay. Saliva-substitute mouthwashes are available in prescription form. See your dentist.

ALTERNATIVE TO DENTURES

Oral implants can be a more permanent solution to tooth loss. Surgically attached to the jawbone, oral implants act as anchors for artificial teeth. Implants are not recommended for people prone to infections. And those with implants must adhere to a very stringent oral hygiene routine. Your dentist can help you decide if implants are right for you.