

# Dental health for seniors



We'll do whatever it takes and then some.

## Preventive care is the key to a healthy smile

Regular dental care becomes even more important as we age because plaque builds up at a faster rate.

To keep teeth strong and healthy and lasting a lifetime, it is important to continue good brushing and flossing habits.

Proper oral care can keep you smiling well into retirement. Contrary to common belief, tooth loss is primarily the result of preventable oral disease and not a result of the aging process. Taking care of your teeth can help them last a lifetime.

The key to prevention is controlling the bacteria found in plaque that cause tooth decay and gum disease. Brushing at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and a soft-bristled toothbrush are as important as ever. Flossing is important to remove plaque between teeth and below the gumline where your toothbrush can't reach.

### Special needs for seniors

As you get older, your dental needs become increasingly specialized, making regular visits to the dentist even more essential. Some common problems to watch for are:

#### Gum (periodontal) disease

Most people don't realize how important it is to take care of their gums as well as their teeth. Gum disease is an infection of the gum tissue that supports the teeth and is the leading cause of tooth loss in adults. Most adults show some signs of gum disease.

- **Gingivitis** is an early stage of gum disease that is reversible with good oral hygiene and professional treatment. Gingivitis is caused by the bacteria found in plaque. Symptoms of gingivitis include red, swollen gums and possible bleeding when you brush. If you have any of these symptoms, see a dentist at once. If left untreated, gingivitis can advance into periodontitis.
- **Periodontitis**, or severe gum disease, affects more than half of 65- to 74-year-olds. With this condition, bacterial infection causes your gums and the bone supporting the teeth to break down. Your gums may begin to recede, pulling back from the teeth. In the worst cases, the bone supporting the teeth is destroyed and, if untreated, can lead to tooth loss.

## WE KEEP YOU SMILING®

Why do 54 million enrollees trust their smiles to Delta Dental?

- More dentists
- Simpler process
- Less out-of-pocket

## Free Newsletter

Get the latest in oral health with *Dental Wire*, our bi-monthly e-mail newsletter. Sign up at: [deltadentalins.com/oral\\_health](http://deltadentalins.com/oral_health)

## Delta Dental Customer Service

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## Oral cancer

Oral cancer most often occurs in people over 40 years of age. See a dentist immediately if you notice any red or white patches on your gums, tongue or other oral tissues, and watch for sores that fail to heal within two weeks. Unfortunately, oral cancer is often difficult to detect in its early stages, when it can be cured more easily. Your dentist should perform a head and neck exam to screen for signs of cancer at your regular checkups.

## Dry mouth

Many seniors take medications that can cause changes to the oral tissues. Many common medications cause a decrease in saliva, leading to dry mouth. Since saliva plays a major role in preventing tooth decay by rinsing away bacteria and food particles and by neutralizing harmful acids, you should talk to your dentist about ways to treat dry mouth.

## Difficulty brushing and flossing

If you have arthritis, you may find it difficult to brush and floss. Ask your dentist for ways to overcome this problem. Certain dental products are designed to make oral care more comfortable. You may want to try strapping the toothbrush to a larger object, such as a ball, to make the brush more comfortable to handle. Electric toothbrushes do a good job removing plaque and can help by doing some of the work for you. Tools to help make flossing easier are available in most drug stores.

## Limited dentist access

Some seniors have less access to dental services because of lack of transportation, medical conditions or limited mobility. Family members or

caregivers can play an important role in helping to schedule regular dental visits for homebound seniors or those in nursing homes. Seniors planning to enter a nursing home or assisted living facility should inquire about the facility's dental care service.

## Maintaining your overall health

Regular dentist visits can do more than keep your teeth healthy — they can tell a dentist a lot about your overall health, including whether you may be developing a disease like diabetes. New research suggests good oral health is essential to good overall health and high quality of life. The best way to achieve good oral health is to prevent disease through daily brushing and flossing and visiting your dentist regularly.

## Finding a dentist

Our website has a dentist directory service to help you locate a Delta Dental dentist and includes a map to each office location.

- Visit our website at [www.deltadentalins.com](http://www.deltadentalins.com) and click on “Find a Dentist” on our home page.
- Select your plan network Enter options for your search such as state and ZIP code (required), dentist name, miles (radius) and type of dentist.
- Then submit.

You may also call one of our helpful multilingual customer service agents toll-free during business hours. Please use the appropriate number listed at the left for your local Customer Service.

*Some information courtesy of the Academy of General Dentistry.*