



*Oral health for an  
ageing population*

## Oral health in older adults

As you get older, you may become more prone to developing certain oral health problems. Senior adults are at an increased risk for tooth loss, gum disease, oral cancer, and other illnesses as well as denture (false teeth) problems and poor nutrition. Dry mouth can also be a problem as you age, often caused by certain medications.

By understanding the oral health risks associated with ageing and taking preventive action – including eating well, not smoking, and limiting your alcohol and sugar

intake – you can protect your teeth and mouth for a lifetime. A healthy mouth that will last well into old age is crucial for a healthy body.

Oral health is an essential part of your overall health and well-being, whether you're 5, 25, 65, or 85 years old. Oral health is a fundamental component of health and physical and mental well-being. It reflects the physiological, social, and psychological attributes that are essential to quality of life.

Good oral health will help you stay healthy, maintain your quality of life, and preserve your independence. **Good oral hygiene, adequate nutrition, and regular visits to your dentist will help you:**



## AVOID PAIN AND INFECTIONS

Oral pain can have several causes, such as dental caries, gingivitis, or dental abscesses. Oral pain can affect your quality of life and may lead to loss of appetite, feelings of depression, and/or risk of infections. If you take medications for other conditions, they may initially mask oral pain that may only be felt once caries or infections have already reached advanced stages.

In case of gum infections, germs can spread into the blood and reach various organs, such as your heart and kidneys. As such, it is important to watch for signs, such as gum bleeding or pain, to prevent possible infections.

All oral diseases are linked to the presence of bacteria in the mouth. Most of these diseases are preventable with adequate and regular oral hygiene habits.

Exemplary oral hygiene and regular visits to your dentist will help you prevent disease and pain.

### TIPS

- Brush your teeth for two minutes, twice a day using either a manual or electric toothbrush and a fluoride toothpaste.
- Don't rinse with water straight after brushing, spit out any excess toothpaste instead.
- If you wear a removable denture, remember to clean it daily.
- Schedule regular appointments with your dentist (at least one visit per year).
- Check for lesions in your mouth. If there is a lesion in your mouth that lasts for more than one week, go the dentist as soon as possible.

*If you feel that your dexterity is decreasing (you have difficulty holding your toothbrush, for example), do not hesitate to ask your dentist, pharmacist, or attending physician for advice. Different assisting devices exist.*



## AVOID FALLS

The joint of your jaw contributes to preserving your balance. Tooth loss without replacement and loose or overused prostheses may increase the risk of falls.

### TIP

- If a tooth becomes loose, or if your denture no longer fits properly, do not wait: go see your dentist as soon as possible.



## ENJOY HEALTHY AND DIVERSE FOODS

Pain, broken or missing teeth, and ill-fitting prostheses can lead to chewing difficulties and may hinder digestion. These issues may also limit your diet. **Cariogenic effect of foods:**

Protective foods	Medium caries risk	High caries risk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• water</li><li>• vegetables</li><li>• butter</li><li>• cheese</li><li>• meat</li><li>• fish</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• dark chocolate (70%)</li><li>• fruit</li><li>• bread</li><li>• nuts</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• sugar</li><li>• sweets</li><li>• cereal bars</li><li>• french fries</li><li>• sugar-sweetened beverages</li><li>• bananas</li></ul>

### TIPS

- Maintain a balanced diet, which means three or four meals a day.
- Avoid eating snacks, particularly those rich in sugar, between meals.
- Prepare well-balanced meals that you enjoy.
- If you are very keen on sweets, try to have them at the end of the meal rather than in between meals.



## AVOID DRY MOUTH

The effects of dry mouth can have a significant impact on your quality of life, affecting how comfortably you can eat, speak, swallow, chew, and smile. Dry mouth happens when you don't have enough saliva to keep your mouth wet. Saliva helps you carry out a number of functions and also cleanses your mouth, which lessens the effect of acids that can cause dental caries.

### TIPS

If you experience dry mouth, you may find relief in:

- chewing sugar-free gum or sucking on sugar-free hard candies to stimulate salivary flow;
- drinking water with meals to help chew and swallow food;
- using alcohol-free mouth rinse;
- using moisturizing mouth spray or gel;
- using a lip balm to soothe cracked or dry lips;
- drinking small amounts of water regularly throughout the day.

*In case of severe dry mouth, do not hesitate to ask your dentist for advice.*



## Making the best of your dentist appointment

You may feel anxious before visiting your dentist. In order to relieve your stress and to facilitate communication with your practitioner, you can:

- Bring a family member or a friend along: this will help you ensure that you do not miss out on information. This way, you will have someone with whom you can discuss possible options after your appointment.
- Before going to your appointment, write down any questions you may have, so that you will not forget them during your appointment.
- Ask your dentist to repeat or rephrase if something seems unclear to you.
- Ask if you can record the conversation on your smartphone, so that you can listen to your discussion again once you are back home.

### TYPICAL QUESTIONS

- Can you explain exactly which oral conditions I have?
- What is the aim of the treatment you're proposing?
- Are there several treatment options? How will they affect me?
- How will the treatment be performed?
- How long will the treatment take?
- How much will the treatment cost?

### Support

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### Recognition

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