

## What Can I Do To Maintain Good Oral Health?

- Drink fluoridated water at recommended level and brush with fluoride toothpaste twice a day. Fluoride protects against dental decay at all ages.
- Practice good oral hygiene. Careful tooth brushing and flossing to reduce dental plaque can help prevent gum disease.
- Caregivers need to help with daily oral hygiene routines of elders who are unable to perform these activities independently.
- Eat a balanced diet low in sugar and starches.
- Avoid tobacco. Smokers have seven times the risk of developing periodontal disease compared to non-smokers.
- Limit alcohol. Drinking high amounts of alcohol is a risk factor for oral and throat cancers.
- Sudden changes in taste and smell need not be considered a sign of aging, but a sign to seek professional care.
- Professional care helps maintain the overall health of the teeth and mouth, and provides for early detection of pre-cancerous or cancerous lesions.
- Make sure that you or your loved one gets dental care prior to having cancer chemotherapy or radiation to the head or neck.
- See your dental provider on a regular basis, even if you have no natural teeth and have dentures.

**National Institute on Aging Age Page**  
<http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/teeth.htm>

**Oral Health for Seniors**  
<http://www.wsdha.com/istore/SeniorOralHealth.pdf>

**CDC Oral Health for Older Americans**  
[http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/factsheets/adult\\_older.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/factsheets/adult_older.htm)

**Washington Area Agencies on Aging**  
[http://www.carewashington.org/list10\\_wa\\_Aging\\_Services\\_senior\\_centers.htm](http://www.carewashington.org/list10_wa_Aging_Services_senior_centers.htm)

**Aging and Long Term Care**  
<http://www.altcWASHINGTON.com/fag.html>

**Aging and Disability Services Administration**  
<http://www.aasa.dshs.wa.gov/>

**Long Term Care Consumer Advocacy Outreach**  
<http://www.ltcop.org/>

### Resources

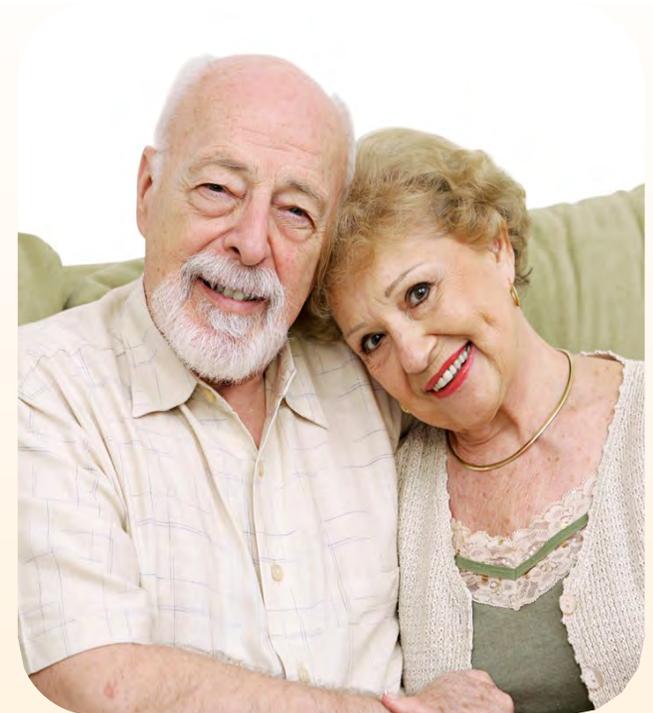
**Find Dental Care**  
<http://doh.wa.gov/cfh/oralhealth/findcare/>

**Reduced Fee Clinics**  
[http://www.oralhealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/Community\\_Clinics\\_2010\\_08.pdf](http://www.oralhealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/Community_Clinics_2010_08.pdf)

**Washington Free Clinic Association**  
<http://www.wafreeclinics.org/clinics.html>

**Washington Information Network 2-1-1**  
<http://www.win211.org/>

# Oral Health for Older Adults



## Oral Health Program

<http://doh.wa.gov/cfh/oralhealth>

**H**ealthy Teeth are necessary for a healthy body. With good habits at home like brushing, flossing, fluoride, regular dental care, and avoiding tobacco products, older adults are able to keep their teeth a lifetime. Everyone, even older adults with dentures need an annual oral cancer screening.



Older Americans with the poorest oral health are those who are economically disadvantaged, lack insurance, and are members of racial and ethnic minorities. The risk of poor oral health increases for those who are disabled, home-bound, or institutionalized.

### Dry Mouth

Be proactive in keeping your mouth healthy by watching for signs of dry mouth. Dry mouth (xerostomia) happens when salivary glands fail to work. Saliva provides a natural cleansing action in the mouth. As the body ages, it stops producing as much saliva. The lack of saliva causes dry mouth and increases the chance of tooth decay.

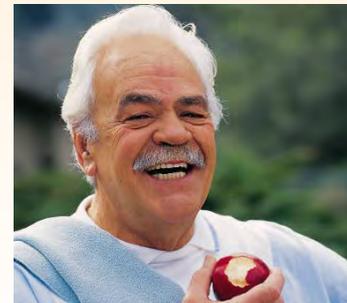
Remember:

- Many medications cause dry mouth.
- Dry mouth can cause cavities and other infections in your mouth.
- Dry mouth can make it hard to eat, swallow, taste and speak.
- Drink lots of water to combat dry mouth.
- Avoid sweets, tobacco, alcohol and caffeine.
- Talk to your dentist or pharmacist if you have severe dry mouth.
- If you have dry mouth, see a dentist immediately before beginning any form of cancer treatment.

### Dentures

If you've lost some or all of your natural teeth, complete dentures, dental implants, or partials can replace your missing teeth and your smile. Replacing missing teeth will benefit both your appearance and your health. Without support from a denture or implants, facial muscles sag, making a person look older. An evaluation by a dentist will help determine the best tooth replacement plan for you.

- Practice good oral hygiene if you wear full dentures or have implant supported dentures.
- Brush your gums, tongue and palate every morning with a soft-bristled brush.
- Floss dental implants before you insert your dentures.



### Root Cavities

As one ages, gingival (gum) recession often occurs, exposing the teeth's root surfaces. Root caries are common among older adults due to their limited production of saliva. Root decay can progress quickly so it is important to have regular preventative cleaning appointments.



### Oral Cancer

Oral cancer most often happens in people over age 40. Treatment works best before the disease spreads. Pain is not usually an early symptom of the disease. A dental check-up is a good time for your dentist to look for signs of oral cancer. Even if you have lost all your natural teeth, you should still see your dentist for regular oral cancer exams.

**Choose a long term care facility that provides regular ongoing dental care.**