



Smiles that Last: Oral Health Care Tips for Older Adults

Maintaining a healthy smile as we age is more than just a cosmetic concern; your smile is a key indicator of your overall health and well-being. As the leading voice to improve oral health across the commonwealth, PA Coalition for Oral Health explores the significance of regular dental care, offers tips for good hygiene practices, and highlights the long-term benefits of oral health care for older adults.

Interested in learning more or looking for free resources, visit paoralhealth.org

The Importance of Regular Dental Care

Just as regular wellness visits are essential for detecting and preventing physical health issues, regular dental check-ups are equally important for maintaining good oral health. As we age, our mouths can change in several ways and poor oral health can lead to pain, poor nutrition, low self-esteem, and negatively impact quality of life.

Oral health conditions like tooth decay and gum disease, caused by harmful bacteria, can be more prevalent in older adults due to naturally receding gum lines, increased experience with dry mouth from medications, and enamel erosion. If left untreated, these conditions can lead to tooth loss which has a substantial impact on one's ability to chew and even speak. Older adults are also at a higher risk of oral cancer, which increases the importance of seeing a dental provider regularly.

As the entry point to our body, the mouth has an undeniable relationship with the rest of the body. Research has shown clear connections between oral health and cardiovascular conditions like heart disease, diabetes, dementia, glaucoma, and certain types of cancer. Bacteria that grows in the mouth from poor oral health can enter the bloodstream and cause inflammation, negatively impact vital organs, and increase some systemic health risks for stroke and heart attacks.

Trouble Accessing Dental Care?

Numerous factors, ranging from cost, transportation, limited physical mobility, or cognitive barriers, can hinder older adults from maintaining their own dental hygiene as well as being able to access a provider in the community.

Prioritizing access to dental care and resources, PA Coalition for Oral Health has developed a library of free resources for individuals, families, caregivers, and providers.

Hygiene Tips at Home or for Caregivers

Maintaining good oral hygiene is key for preventing dental issues

- Brush daily with a soft-bristled brush using fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss daily and after meals.
- Clean dentures daily.
- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.
- Choose healthy foods and beverages with low sugar that won't get stuck in teeth.

Regular dental visits can help older adults stay healthy and save money

Average savings for those with at least one yearly dental visit

- Patients with diabetes:
 - **\$549 annual cost savings**
- Patients with coronary artery disease:
 - **\$548 annual cost savings**
- Patients with both conditions:
 - **\$866 annual cost savings**

Free Oral Health Resources:

- **Finding Dental Care in PA** - Available in English & Spanish
- **Oral Health and Older Adults in Long Term Facilities Course** - Newly Added!

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