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GUEST ARTICLE: UNITED CONCORDIA DENTAL

UNITED CONCORDIA[®] DENTAL

CELEBRATE AGING!



Whether we like it or not, we're all getting older every day—and it's reason to celebrate right now, as September is National Healthy Aging Month! Read below to learn about some of the oral health issues older adults experience and how to make your smile last a lifetime.

Feeling Dry in the Mouth?

As we age, our glands produce less saliva, which can cause dry mouth. In fact, nearly one-third of adults over age 65 have this condition.¹ Just like it sounds, your mouth may feel dry and sticky all the time. You may have symptoms such as bad breath, and a hard time talking, eating, swallowing and even smiling. Lack of saliva can also lead to a higher risk of cavities and gum disease, but this condition is typically treatable with the help of your dentist.

Dry mouth can be a side effect of many medical treatments like chemotherapy or head and neck radiation.² It can also be a symptom of diseases such as Sjogren's syndrome or diabetes. Dry mouth can also be caused by many prescription and everyday medications such as ibuprofen or cold remedies. Check with your doctor to see whether any medications you take put you at risk for dry mouth. Other causes of dry mouth are inadequate nutrition and dehydration.³

To combat this condition—which creates an environment where bacteria thrive—try to sip water throughout the day, chew sugarless gum or suck on sugarless lozenges. Using an over-the-counter saliva substitute also may help.

Caring for Your Mouth After Dentures



If you've lost all your natural teeth, whether from gum disease, tooth decay or injury, replacing missing teeth will benefit your appearance and your health. When you lose all your teeth, facial muscles can droop – impacting your smile and making you look older than your age. Many people in this situation use dentures, detachable appliances made of metal or acrylic (plastic), to replace lost teeth and find their smiles again. A complete or "full" denture replaces all the natural teeth in the lower or upper jaw. A "partial" denture is one that fills in the spaces left by missing teeth.

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Wearing dentures or partials to replace lost teeth doesn't just give you a bright new smile—they can help you chew and talk normally again, plus make your face look fuller.

Dentures and your dentist

Like natural teeth, dentures need to be cared for and your mouth and gums will require some extra attention, too. Individuals with dentures or without teeth still need to see their dentist regularly, according to the Oral Health Foundation. Over time, dentures can loosen and rub gums and cheeks, causing tenderness and mouth sores, so it's important to make sure they fit right. If you have pain, or if your dentures move when you eat or talk, have your dentist check them.

Denture care at home

Taking care of your dentures at home is also important. You should take them out and rest your gums for 6-8 hours a day, and clean and massage your gums using gauze, a soft washcloth or a soft-bristle toothbrush. Brush and floss any natural teeth, and clean your tongue, cheeks and the roof of your mouth. Using a non-abrasive denture cleaner, brush all the surfaces of the dentures daily, including the surface that fits against your gums. This is especially important if you use any kind of denture fixative. Soak your dentures overnight in a denture-cleaning solution, following the manufacturer's instructions.

Prevent Gum Disease so Your Smile Lasts a Lifetime



If your dentist has told you that you have periodontal (gum) disease, you're not alone. An estimated 75% of all American adults have some form of gum disease.⁴ And more than 68% of adults age 65 and older experience severe gum disease, or periodontitis.¹

This condition is the result of an infection and inflammation of the gums, ligaments and bone around the teeth. The main culprit of gum disease is plaque, which is a sticky film that contains bacteria. If not removed with regular brushing and flossing, gum disease can begin. While gum disease progresses slowly, if left untreated, it can lead to extensive bone loss that causes teeth to loosen. Eventually, the affected teeth could need to be removed.

Gingivitis is the earliest stage of gum disease, where the gums become red, swollen and bleed easily, and bad breath may be noticed. This phase of gum disease is typically remedied by a routine cleaning at the dental office along with proper home care.

When gingivitis remains unchecked, plaque is allowed to harden into tartar, which can then cause gum tissue to pull away from the teeth and lead to the deterioration of the bone and ligaments holding the teeth in place. This advanced stage of gum disease is often referred to as periodontitis.

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Preventing gum disease

Practicing good oral health habits at every age can help keep gum disease in check. To keep your smile healthy for a lifetime:

- Brush thoroughly with a soft-bristled toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste at least twice a day, brushing on and around the gum line. Replace toothbrushes often.
- Floss once a day. If you are too tired to do it at night or feel too rushed in the morning, flossing after lunch is a good habit to develop.
- If you have arthritis, using an electric toothbrush or air flosser can help.
- Rinse with an antimicrobial mouthwash to reduce bacteria in the mouth.
- Sip water throughout the day to prevent dry mouth or try sugarless gum or lozenges.
- Schedule routine dental checkups and regular professional cleanings based on your dentist's recommendation.
- Don't smoke or use tobacco products, as they increase the risk of gum disease and make it harder for gum tissue to heal.
- Avoid sugar, choose healthy foods like yogurt and fruit and drink lots of water.
- If you are diabetic, keep your sugar levels under control, as high levels can heighten the risk for gum disease.

Cut Down on the Candy

With the enormous amount of candy given out at this time of year, consider giving your trick-or-treaters something different this year. Some alternative Halloween treats you can share are organic juice boxes, hot cocoa packets, craft supplies, or even toothbrushes!

If your kids bring home a bag of candy, try to monitor how much they eat and limit their daily consumption to a couple of pieces. Remember that hard candy and sticky staples like taffy and caramel expose the teeth to sugar for longer periods of time. Encouraging your child to drink water after they eat treats will help rinse away sugar, and brushing after eating sweets is a must!

Sources:

¹ Aging and Dental Health; ada.org; July 2, 2019

² *Xerostomia; Oral Cancer Foundation; 2019

³ National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, Older Adults & Aging, Information for Caregivers, Dry Mouth & Older Adults, nidcr.nih.gov, 2018

⁴ Dispelling Myths About Gum Disease; American Academy of Periodontology; 2010