

## DENTAL CARE

### Senior Oral Health Issues

As we age, it is more important than ever to maintain a healthy smile – but seniors may face special challenges in dental care:

**Cavities and decay** on the root surfaces of the teeth are more common in older adults. So it's important to brush with a fluoride toothpaste, floss daily and see your dentist regularly.

**Tooth sensitivity** can be an increasing problem as one ages. Your gums naturally recede over time, exposing areas of the tooth that are not protected by enamel. If the problem persists, see your dentist, as the sensitivity may be an indication of a more serious condition, such as a cavity or a cracked or fractured tooth.

**Dry mouth** is a common condition in seniors, and one that may be caused by medications or certain medical disorders. Left untreated, dry mouth can damage your teeth. Your dentist can recommend various methods to restore moisture in your mouth, as well as appropriate treatments or medications to help prevent the problems associated with dry mouth.

**Dentures** can make life easier for many seniors, but they require special care. Follow your dentist's instructions carefully and see your dentist if any problems arise. An annual checkup is recommended for long-term denture wearers.

**Gum disease** is a potentially serious condition that can affect people of all ages, but especially people over 40. A number of factors can increase the severity of gum disease, including environmental factors, and even certain medications.

Because the earliest stages of gum disease are reversible, it is important to spot it early on. Regular dental checkups can insure early detection and treatment of gum disease. Best of all, it is easy to prevent gum disease from developing in the first place, by practicing proper oral hygiene.

**Existing health conditions** such as diabetes, heart disease, or cancer, can also affect your oral health. Be sure to let your dentist know of any general health issues you're facing, so that he or she understands the whole situation and can help you meet your special requirements.

*(adapted from Colgate.com)*

## Paying for Dental Care

**Medicare** doesn't cover most dental care, dental procedures like cleanings, fillings, tooth extractions, dentures, dental plates, or other dental devices. Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance) will pay for certain dental services that you get when you're in a hospital. Part A can pay for inpatient hospital care if you need to have emergency or complicated dental procedures, even though the dental care isn't covered.

**NJ Medicaid/Family Care** may cover dental exams and treatments – but you will need to use an approved Medicaid provider. Contact your Medicaid managed care organization for information.

## Dental Care Providers

**Dental Home Services** provides in-home services to patients with special needs, disabilities, and anyone who has trouble traveling to the dentist's office 1-800-842-4663  
[www.dentalhomeservices.com](http://www.dentalhomeservices.com)<<http://www.dentalhomeservices.com>>

Dental Home Services charges customary dental fees, plus a minimal fee for traveling expenses. In order to keep fees reasonable, we request that payment be made at the time services are rendered. For patients with dental insurance, Dental Home Services provides assistance in filling out the proper insurance forms and asking the insurance company to send payment directly to the patient.

**Zufall Health** Morristown Medical and Dental Clinic - federally qualified health center. The clinic has a full time dental program including a **mobile dental van that visits Ridge Oak**, as well as providing basic primary care, such as check-ups, immunizations, blood tests, and treatment of minor ailments for children, adults and senior citizens (973) 267-0002; 4 Atno Avenue, Morristown, NJ.

<http://www.zufallhealth.org/services/dental-services/adult-dental-services/>

## Dental Care Resources:

**Mouth Healthy** is a website created and maintained by the American Dental Association [ADA] There is a section devoted to dental care issues for seniors:

<http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/adults-over-60/>

### **Practical Hints:**

**Brushing** and **flossing** your teeth is just as important for you as it is for your grandchildren.

People who suffer from **arthritis** or other problems of dexterity may find it difficult and painful to practice good oral hygiene.

**Ergonomic devices** such as toothbrushes and floss holders that make it easier to grasp and control can help, but you can also use items around the house to help you. Insert the handle of your toothbrush into a small rubber ball for an easier grip, or extend the handle by attaching a small piece of plastic or a popsicle stick.

**Dental Floss** can be tied into a tiny loop on either side, making it easier to grasp and control the floss with your fingers.

If you wear **Dentures**, be sure to take them out for at least four hours each day. Dentures should be rinsed with a cleaner specifically made for dentures – not with regular toothpaste.