



### Ageing and Oral Health

As we age, our bodies go through wear and tear, surprisingly, this includes our teeth and gums. Maintaining oral health helps in the long term. The impact of deteriorating oral health increases as we age. This complicates any other acute and chronic illnesses we are burdened with.

Put another way, Ageing should be a positive experience, but oral health issues with gums, teeth, implants or dentures can negatively affect the well being of our elders.

For carers: Carers play an integral role in maintaining the oral health of our elders, follow this link for [oral health advice for aged care workers](#).



### Oral health conditions and the increased risks with ageing

#### Dry Mouth Syndrome

Common causes of dry mouth syndrome include; medications, infections, smoking, auto-immune diseases, hormone changes, dehydration amongst many others. The lack of saliva in your mouth will affect eating and speaking and will no longer protect the teeth and gums from infections and diseases. The lack of lubrication will cause dentures to rub and become painful which can then affect nutrition and general health.

#### Tooth wear and erosion

Every year we wear down, crack and chip our teeth from chewing and grinding them against each other and whatever we put in our mouths. Over time, this all adds up, and increases the potential for tooth sensitivity, tooth splitting and increases the risk of tooth decay (caries).

#### Gum Disease

Gum disease (periodontitis) or more commonly known as gingivitis, in its early stages of progression; is at a greater risk as we age. It is associated with unmanaged diabetes which is in epidemic proportions, smoking tobacco and other recreational drugs, poor nutrition and oral hygiene practices. Unmanaged periodontitis is a chronic inflammation which not only destroys the gums but also the underlying bone. Teeth subsequently lose their support and become loose and can literally fall out.

#### Root Decay

As mentioned above. Gum disease leads to destruction of the gums and bone supporting teeth, exposing more of the root surface, which is not as hard as the enamel crown of a tooth. This can also be aggravated by over-brushing or more commonly poor oral hygiene routines. Once the roots of the teeth are exposed, just like a tree, they are more likely to become invaded by bacteria. This is decay!

#### Other Oral Diseases

Fungal infections, and potential malignant conditions are other oral health concerns at an increased risk as we age. These can cause sores, which, if neglected can have serious consequences. They can also be challenging to discern.

For carers: Carers should be mindful and aware of these conditions and risks to best assist in the maintenance of their client's oral health.

### Maintaining good oral health into our elder years

#### Regular Dental Check-ups

It is important to maintain regular dental check-ups as directed by your dentist. Being proactive about oral health is one of the best defenses. Tooth wear, decay and gum disease can be identified early which allows for [preventative treatments](#) to manage any concerns more efficiently. The longer issues are left unaddressed the more likely, more expensive [restorative treatments](#) will be required.

#### Increase Remineralising Products

There are a range of different products that assist in remineralising teeth, ensure your toothpaste and mouth-rinse contain fluoride. Dr Bob Cvetkovic may suggest other products to help assist in the remineralisation process.

#### Avoid Tobacco

People who smoke are at a higher risk of tooth decay, gum disease, and other oral health concerns such as oral cancers. Smoking is also linked to cardiovascular disease and other more serious health problems. Avoid smoking and try to quit. Follow these links for more information on [smoking and oral health](#) and [quitting](#).

#### Increase Saliva and Hydration

Medications can be a contributing factor to a decrease in saliva production, speak with your general practitioner about reviewing and changing medication if possible. Otherwise drink plenty of water to ensure you stay hydrated, limit alcohol and caffeine as well as chew sugar free



gum. Dr Bob Cvetkovic may suggest more specific practices to help in increasing saliva production.

#### Reduce Sugar

Reducing the amount of sugar consumed can significantly decrease your risk of tooth decay. Try to avoid bottled drinks and reduce how much sugar is added to tea and coffee. Convenience foods are highly processed (manufactured) foods and often contain more sugars. Try to avoid snacks like chocolate bars and candy.





### Ageing health conditions that impact a person's capability to care for their own oral health - Two examples

#### Arthritis

Arthritis (both Osteo and rheumatoid) can be debilitating, this includes stiffness and losing muscular power to do what was once simple. Brushing and flossing teeth becomes fatiguing, frustrating and often then neglected. These issues can be addressed, and Dr Bob Cvetkovic will suggest and number of ways to achieve this; some being:

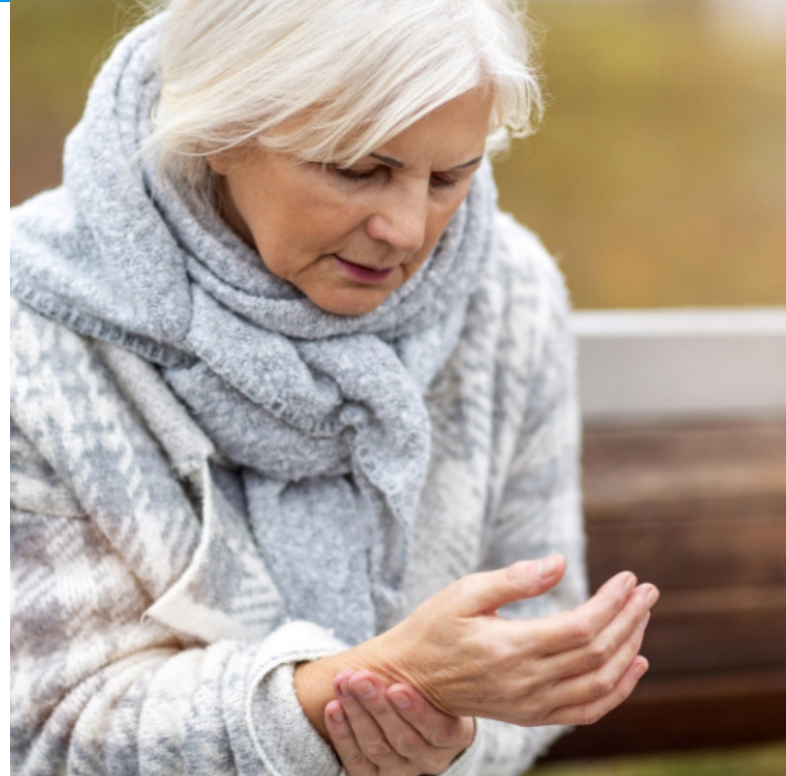
Using an electric toothbrush which reduces the amount of physical movement and puts less strain through the arm, wrist and hand.

Modifying or buying handles for toothbrushes and flossers that make it easier to handle.

In extreme cases, or at a certain point in time; it may be necessary for a carer to assist with oral hygiene for teeth and dentures.

#### Dementia

Dementia can be well managed when diagnosed early, a person can live a healthy and fulfilled life. People can be unaware of changes, family and friends may not see the subtle ways that a loved one can disguise their limitations. Diet and personal care suffers, and oral health can rapidly decline and be challenging to manage when a



person cannot understand. Each case is as unique as the individual and the level of aid will vary from person to person.

For Carers: Be sure to monitor the person's oral hygiene routine and ensure they are using suitable oral hygiene products. Aid in nutrition and ensure they stay hydrated. Some potential ways to ensure oral hygiene is maintained:

- Reminders - Help set up a daily reminder chart or calendar for brushing teeth and other oral hygiene practices. Smartphones can potentially be utilised for alarms or reminders.
- Always monitor your family or clients overall oral health, look for physical changes in appearance and behaviour. Provide emotional and moral support.
- Produce a printed medical summary and ensure it is updated regularly. This can aid with dental appointments if a support person is unable to attend the appointment.

[Follow this link for more information on caring for people with dementia.](#)





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