

A Lifetime of Healthy Teeth and Gums

People are now living longer and healthier lives, and older adults are more likely than ever before to keep their teeth for a lifetime. However, research has shown that older people also have the highest rates of periodontal disease. In fact, at least half of people over age 55 have some form of periodontal disease, and almost one out of four people over 65 have lost all their teeth.

No matter what your age, it is important to keep your teeth and gums healthy. If you've succeeded in avoiding periodontal disease as you age, it is especially important to continue to maintain your oral care routine. Be sure to brush and floss daily, and see a dental professional, such as a periodontist, regularly. You should also receive a comprehensive periodontal exam each year. This will ensure that your oral health (and possibly even your overall health) stays at its best. If you have dexterity problems or a physical disability and are finding it difficult to properly brush or floss your teeth, your dentist or periodontist can suggest options such as an electric toothbrush or floss holder.

Research has shown that periodontal disease is a chronic inflammatory disease that may put you at a higher risk for other diseases including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and

Alzheimer's disease. During your regular visits with your dentist or periodontist, be sure to let him or her know if you have any of these medical conditions or if you have a family history of disease. Likewise, if you have been diagnosed with periodontal disease, it's a good idea to share this information with your physician to ensure that you're receiving appropriate care.

You should also tell your dentist or periodontist about any medications you are taking, because many medications can impact your oral health and therefore affect your dental treatment. Hundreds of common medications - including antihistamines and high blood pressure medications - can cause side effects such as soft tissue changes, taste changes, and gum overgrowth. Another possible side effect of some medications is dry mouth, a condition that leaves the mouth without enough saliva to wash away food from your teeth. This may leave you more susceptible to tooth decay and periodontal disease, and can cause sore throat, problems with speaking, and difficulty swallowing.

Maintaining your oral health should be a priority at any age. As you get older, be sure to continue to take care of your teeth and gums to ensure that they'll stay healthy and strong for life!



Special Concerns for Women

Women who are menopausal or post-menopausal may experience changes in their mouth including dry mouth, pain or burning sensations in the gum tissue, and altered taste due to hormonal changes. Additionally, menopausal women should be concerned about osteoporosis, which can lead to tooth loss if the density of the bone that supports the teeth has decreased. Talk to your doctor about hormone replacement therapy or estrogen supplements, which may help symptoms of menopause.

The American Academy of Periodontology Patient Page is a public service of the AAP and should not be used as a substitute for the care and advice of your personal periodontist. There may be variations in treatment that your periodontist will recommend based on individual facts and circumstances. Visit perio.org to assess your risk and for more information on periodontal disease.