

OralLongevity™ Questions and Answers

Regular Checkups

1) Do I still need to get regular checkups if I have no dental problems?

- **YES!** Older adults are at risk for getting cavities, gum disease and mouth cancer – and these may not cause any pain or discomfort until they are advanced.
- Everyone needs to see their dentist for a checkup at least once a year – preferably more often.

2) What if I have none of my natural teeth, do I still need to get regular checkups?

- **YES!** People with no natural teeth are at risk for mouth cancer as well as gum problems. Denture wearers need to have their mouth and their dentures checked at least once a year.

3) I still have most of my teeth; can I keep them for the rest of my life?

- **YES!** Older adults need to keep their mouths clean by brushing and flossing and they should see their dentist once or twice a year (or more often, if needed).

Changing Mouth

4) Does your mouth change as you get older?

- **YES!** Among other things, the nerves in your teeth can become smaller with age, making your teeth less sensitive to cavities or other problems.

5) Are older people more likely to lose their teeth than younger people?

- **YES!** Older adults are less likely to feel pain in their teeth which may keep them from getting care until it is too late to save the tooth.

Cavities & Fluoride

6) Can older people still get cavities?

- **YES!**

7) How does this happen?

- Exposed root surfaces and older fillings are prone to cavities. Medications that dry the mouth and selection of softer, sweeter foods put them at greater risk of getting cavities.
- Old fillings sometimes break down and become sites for cavities.

8) What about fluoride, does it help older adults?

- **YES!** Natural teeth can always be helped by fluoride

Mouth Cancer

9) Are older adults at risk for mouth cancer?

- **YES!** As with many other cancers, older adults are more likely to get mouth cancer than younger people.
- Everyone is at a greater risk of getting mouth cancer if they use tobacco, drink alcohol a lot or are repeatedly exposed to the sunlight.

10) How do I know if I have mouth cancer? Does it cause pain?

- Mouth cancer can be a red or white patch or any change in your mouth that lasts for more than 2 weeks. Oral cancer is typically painless in the early stages, making regular dentist visits for a complete oral examination very important.

11) What if I think I have cancer in my mouth?

- See your dentist immediately to get a thorough oral cancer examination.
- As with other cancers, the earlier mouth cancer is treated, the better the prognosis will be.

Periodontal Disease

12) What is periodontal disease? Can I get it?

- **YES!** Periodontal disease is an infection of your gums.
- Everyone with natural teeth is at risk of getting it.

13) How can I prevent getting periodontal disease?

You can prevent periodontal disease by:

- Cleaning your teeth and gums thoroughly every day
- Getting regular checkups from your dentist
- Following the advice of your dentist and dental hygienist

14) What can happen if I get gum disease?

- With gum disease, you may have difficulty eating, bad breath and pain.
- Severe gum disease has also been associated with pneumonia in long-term care patients, heart disease, stroke, and poor diabetic control.

Dry Mouth

15) My mouth is dry, is that because I am old?

- **NO!** Having a dry mouth is NOT a result of aging, but is often related to taking medicines.

16) What can I do if my mouth is dry?

- Check with your dentist or physician to find out what the cause may be. Your dentist or physician may be able to change your medicines so that they have less of a drying effect.

17) What else can I do if my mouth is dry?

You have several options to help dry mouth:

- Use mouth moisteners and sprays – you can buy them at any drugstore.
- Sip water throughout the day – don't wait until you are thirsty.
- Have sugar-free gum or candies.

OralLongevity™ is a collaboration between the American Dental Association (ADA), the ADA Foundation (ADAF) and GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare (GSKCH). The OralLongevity initiative was designed to enhance and preserve the oral health of older Americans.