Dental Care for Older Adults | Core Dental

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Details:

Yes. Dental care matters at every age, and it can become more important as people grow older. Gum disease, dry mouth, worn or broken teeth, denture problems and difficulty with cleaning become more common, and oral health is linked to general health, eating and quality of life. Older adults may also take several medicines and have chronic conditions, which affect dental care. At Core Dental we plan care around your health, comfort and goals, and we welcome carers and family members to appointments.

Why does dental care matter more as we age?

Australia's population is ageing, and many people are keeping their natural teeth into older age. That is good news, but it means older teeth and gums need ongoing attention. Over a lifetime, teeth can wear, fillings and crowns can age, gums can recede, and dry mouth can make decay more likely. Many older adults also manage several chronic health conditions at once, and this affects the way dental care is planned.

Regular care helps us find problems early, when they are usually simpler to treat, and it can help you keep eating, speaking and smiling comfortably.

How is oral health linked to general health in older adults?

Oral health and general health are closely connected.

Gum health and heart health. Gum disease and cardiovascular disease are both common in older age, and research has found links between the two.

Oral health and diabetes. Gum disease can make blood sugar harder to manage, and diabetes can make gum disease harder to control. See our article on how diabetes affects your oral health .

Chewing and nutrition. Being able to chew comfortably supports a varied diet, digestion and the enjoyment of food, all of which matter for wellbeing.

Infection risk. Bacteria from untreated gum disease and infected teeth can affect general health, particularly for people who are frail or unwell.

We encourage you to tell your dentist about your medical conditions and medicines, and to let your doctor know about any dental problems.

Why do older people often not report dental problems?

Many older adults do not mention dental discomfort, or may not recognise it. Some people put up with pain, assume it is a normal part of ageing, or feel it is not worth the fuss. As a result, dental needs can go unmet until a problem becomes serious.

Family members, carers and friends can make a real difference by asking about mouth pain, difficulty eating, loose dentures or bad breath, and by helping with booking and getting to appointments. Please

tell us if you are supporting someone, and we will make every effort to keep the visit comfortable and clear.

What makes it harder to keep teeth and gums clean?

Several physical and mental changes can make daily cleaning difficult.

Reduced hand dexterity. Arthritis or weak grip can make brushing and flossing hard. A brush with a larger handle, an electric toothbrush or interdental brushes may help.

Memory problems. Forgetting to clean teeth or thinking it has already been done can lead to plaque build up.

Poor eyesight. It can be hard to see what needs cleaning, especially along the gum line.

Dry mouth. Many common medicines reduce saliva, which normally helps protect teeth from decay.

Our team can show you or your carer simple techniques and tools, and suggest a cleaning routine that works for you. Our article on looking after your oral health between hygienist appointments has further ideas.

What dental care might older adults need?

Needs vary from person to person, but older adults commonly benefit from:

regular check-ups and hygiene visits

treatment and monitoring of gum disease

fillings and restorations for worn or decayed teeth

dentures , bridges or implant-retained dentures to replace missing teeth

checks of the mouth for sores and changes that should be looked at

Your dentist will recommend what is appropriate after an examination and a talk about your health and goals.

How do we support older patients at Core Dental?

We aim to make each visit unhurried and clear. We explain options in plain language, quote before treatment starts and talk through fees, and we can discuss interest-free payment plans for eligible treatment. You are welcome to bring a family member or carer. Please let us know about any mobility needs, medical conditions or anxieties when you book so that we can plan ahead.

How quickly is Australia's older population growing?

Fast enough to change what general dental practice looks like.

Australia's population is not only growing, it is also ageing, and the age group of 65 and older is the fastest growing, as the baby boomer generation lives longer than its less numerous predecessors. The Australian Bureau of Statistics records that over the past two decades the number of Australians living beyond the age of 85 has almost doubled.

As part of the health system managing a rapidly growing cohort of older patients with multiple chronic medical conditions, dentists are treating many more senior teeth than a generation ago. That is the context for treating geriatric dental care as mainstream care rather than a specialty concern.

What are the four barriers to older people getting dental care?

They are practical rather than clinical, and each one is addressable once named.

Stoicism and apathy

Older people often do not complain about problems with their dentures, teeth or gums, and sometimes do not recognise a problem at all. Their dental needs therefore go unmet unless they have the support of family members, carers or younger friends who can prompt them to look out for problems and help them get to an appointment.

Physical and mental impairment

Reduced dexterity, arthritis in the hands, poor eyesight and cognitive decline all make a twice-daily cleaning routine harder to carry out well, even where the intention is there.

Altered diet

Frequent snacking and an increased preference for sweet foods are both common with age, and both increase decay risk at exactly the point when the mouth is least able to tolerate it.

Mobility

Perhaps the greatest impediment for most older people is transport. Many no longer drive, and many are unable, or not confident, to use public transport. A clinic that cannot be reached is a clinic that will not be attended, which is one reason ground-floor street-level access matters at this end of life as much as any other.

Why do older people's teeth deteriorate so quickly?

Because several risk factors arrive together, and they compound rather than simply add.

Poor oral hygiene combines with a higher incidence of dry mouth, which is a product of ageing exacerbated by many medications, along with frequent snacking and a greater appetite for sweet foods. With little saliva to lubricate and buffer the mouth, and with weakened muscle control, food and bacteria tend to stagnate between loose teeth and under dentures, leading to extensive decay, worsening gum health and diseased soft tissues.

Two consequences follow that are specific to this age group. Decaying teeth in older people seldom cause pain until the damage is advanced, by which point removal is often the only option left. And gum disease is both more prevalent and more severe in older adults, for the same combination of reasons.

This is why we look rather than wait to be told, and why a check-up for an older patient is not a formality even when nothing is being reported.

What happens to oral care in residential aged care?

It is often neglected, and the reasons are structural rather than anyone's indifference.

In the aged care setting where so many older people live, residents may forget to clean their teeth or dentures, while staff typically have little or no training in oral care and a great many other tasks competing for their time. The result is that the people with the highest oral disease risk and the least capacity to manage it often receive the least day-to-day attention to it.

Families and carers can make a material difference here by asking specifically about oral care in a facility, by checking dentures are cleaned and stored overnight, and by arranging regular dental review rather than waiting for a complaint. We are glad to provide home-care guidelines that a carer can follow, and a carer or family member is welcome to attend the appointment and take those instructions with them.

Frequently asked questions

How often should older adults see the dentist?

It varies. Many people benefit from regular check-ups, but your dentist may suggest more frequent visits if you have gum disease, dry mouth or complex dental work. We will recommend a schedule based on your needs.

Can gum disease affect general health?

Research has found links between gum disease and conditions such as heart disease and diabetes, although the relationships are complex. Looking after your gums is one way to support your overall health.

What can I do about dry mouth?

Dry mouth is often related to medicines. Sipping water, using sugar-free products and fluoride toothpaste may help, and your dentist or doctor can suggest further options. Please mention it at your check-up.

Can a carer come to the appointment?

Yes. You are welcome to bring a family member or carer. Please let us know when you book so we can allow time, and we can explain care and cleaning techniques to them too.

Do I still need to clean my teeth if I wear dentures?

Yes. Dentures need daily cleaning, and any natural teeth, gums and tongue still need care. Regular check-ups also help us make sure dentures fit comfortably.

How much has the number of very old Australians grown?

The Australian Bureau of Statistics records that over the past two decades the number of Australians living beyond the age of 85 has almost doubled, and the 65-and-over group is the fastest growing age group in the country.

Why doesn't decay hurt until it is too late?

In older people, decaying teeth seldom cause pain until the damage is advanced, which is why problems are frequently found at the point where removal is the only remaining option. It is also why we examine rather than rely on symptoms being reported.

What is the biggest practical barrier to older people attending?

Transport. Many older people no longer drive and are unable or not confident to use public transport, so an appointment that cannot be reached will not be attended regardless of how necessary it is.

Is oral care usually managed well in aged care facilities?

Often not, for structural reasons: residents may forget, and staff typically have little or no training in oral care alongside many competing tasks. Asking specifically about oral care, and arranging regular dental review rather than waiting for a complaint, makes a real difference.

Related services and further reading

General dentistry

Dental check-ups

Dentures

Dentures or implants for seniors

Maintenance involved with dentures

How does diabetes affect your oral health?

Why do people suffer from gum disease?

Periodontics

How can we help?

If you or someone you care for needs a dental check or has trouble with teeth, gums or dentures, our team can help at any of our nine Core Dental clinics. Call 13 13 16 or book online, and tell us about any health conditions or support needs so we can plan your visit.

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week, with Monday to Friday hours to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online at coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday mornings, Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before

proceeding.

Why is gum disease a concern for older adults?

Gum disease is common and can be severe in older age, and it is linked with general health conditions. Core Dental dentists screen the gums at check-ups and explain treatment where it is needed.

How is oral health connected to heart health and diabetes?

Gum health has links with cardiovascular health and diabetes control, both of which are common in older age. Core Dental dentists ask about your medical history to plan safe and suitable dental care.

Why might older patients not mention dental pain?

Some older adults put up with discomfort or do not recognise problems, so needs can go unmet. Core Dental encourages families and carers to ask about mouth pain and to help with booking.

What makes oral hygiene harder in later life?

Reduced hand dexterity, memory problems, poor eyesight and dry mouth can all make cleaning harder. Core Dental dentists can suggest simple tools and routines to suit you or your carer.

Can Core Dental help with dentures and missing teeth?

Yes. Core Dental offers dentures, bridges and implant-retained dentures, and our dentists explain which options may suit you after an examination. Results vary between people.

Can a family member or carer attend my Core Dental appointment?

Yes. You are welcome to bring a family member or carer to Core Dental, and we can explain care routines to them. Please mention your support needs when you book.

Does Core Dental offer payment plans for older patients?

Core Dental offers interest-free payment plans for eligible treatment and quotes before treatment starts. Terms depend on the finance provider and eligibility, so please confirm details when you book.

How do I book a dental check for an older relative at Core Dental?

Call 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au for any of our nine clinics. Tell our team about any health conditions, mobility needs or worries so we can plan the visit.