



# ORAL HEALTH AND THE ELDERLY

## Introduction

PREVENTION is the key to healthy living. To maintain oral health throughout your life means daily oral care and regular professional care has been a priority throughout your life. With appropriate daily oral care and a regular oral examination and teeth cleaning schedule, a dentition can be maintained throughout a lifetime. Keeping your mouth healthy doesn't happen by accident.

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## HEALTHY SMILES FOR A LIFETIME

## No Pain = No Problem Myth

In our practice we often dispel the myth that no pain equals no problem. As one ages, the nerves and blood vessels inside a tooth shrink. Older persons do not experience tooth pain as significantly as someone who is younger. Significant tooth decay and destruction can occur with no oral symptom or manifestation. It is not uncommon for an older person to be unaware of a broken tooth.

Often, people who wear complete or partial dentures think that they do not need to have a dentist check their dentures because they still fit as well as the day they received them.

Unfortunately, there can be a number of oral problems, such as ill-fitting dentures and oral cancer causing bony destruction, mouth ulcers, and even death with minimal or no oral symptom or manifestation. When teeth are removed, the bone continually resorbs or “dissolves”. This process occurs so slowly that a person who wears dentures can easily accommodate to these bony changes for many years. Unfortunately, when a person with dentures starts to recognize a problem with the fit of the denture, the oral problem is quite advanced.

An essential method of detecting oral problems while still reparable is by a comprehensive oral examination by a dental professional every six months. Prevention and early detection of problems are the keys to maintaining a healthy smile for a lifetime.

## Oral Diseases found in the Elderly

- Tooth decay
- Gum disease
- Dry mouth
- Ill-fitting dentures
- Oral cancer



*Poor oral hygiene, dry mouth, and tooth decay*

## Problems caused by Oral Diseases in the Elderly

- Pain
- Systemic infection
- Loss of oral function
  - difficulty eating
  - impaired nutritional intake
  - poor taste
  - poor communication
  - poor interpersonal contacts



*Ill-fitting Dentures*



*Oral cancer of the tongue*

## THE PREVENTION OF ORAL DISEASE IN THE ELDERLY

### Oral Care for Individuals with Teeth

- Daily brushing and flossing
  - Use fluoridated toothpaste
  - 2-3 times per day: after meals and before bedtime
- Regular dental visits every 3-4 months

### Oral Care for Individuals with dentures or without teeth

- Daily removal of dentures at night: dentures should be cleaned and placed in denture cup with water overnight.
- Brush the gums and roof of the mouth after removal of the dentures.
- Dentures should be labeled with the person's name so as to avoid misplacement.
- Regular dental visits every 6 months

**Contact Drs. Mary Fisher (248-932-9243) and Elisa Ghezzi (734-358-0275) if you have any questions about oral health care.**

