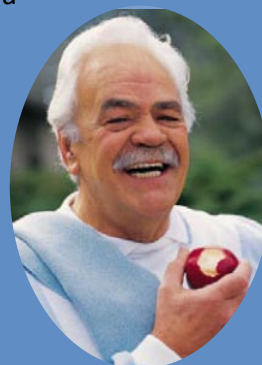


Oral Health of Older Adults

Primary Care: Quick Facts

- Compared with other age groups, older adults have **less access** to oral care services and **poorer oral health** status
 - 30% visited a dentist compared to 88% visited a physician annually;
 - 75% of senior men and 83% of senior women have **no dental insurance**;
 - Many standard dental **treatment options** are invasive, complex, expensive and often, not available to non-ambulatory older adults living independently; and
 - Up to 90% of older adults **don't perceive the need** for dental care.
- Nearly 7% of all health expenditures are for oral health care, **ranking 2nd** in diagnostic categories behind cardiovascular care and **exceeding** mental health, cancer, diabetes and pulmonary diseases.
- Research has shown the important **link between** oral disease and systemic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and respiratory diseases,
 - Oral diseases are **progressive** and **cumulative** if untreated and become more complex over time, and
 - Poor oral health is an important contributing factor to involuntary weight loss.
- Oral disease, pain and dysfunction can have an acute impact on the **quality of life** of older adults, **affecting** their chewing, eating, speaking, self-esteem, health, social interactions and relationships.
- More older adults are **retaining** a greater percentage of their natural teeth than those of previous generations.
 - **Tooth decay** is more than 3 times greater for older adults than for those under 45 years and exceeded tooth decay rates of adolescents;
 - Older adults with **tooth decay** and **oral pain** have compromised chewing, possibly causing them to try to swallow larger amounts of food and inadvertently **aspirate**; and
 - Denture-wearers frequently report that nothing is wrong with their **uncomfortable dentures** because such discomfort has become an **accepted** part of aging.
- More than 400 medications commonly used by older adults especially those used for chronic conditions can result in a **dry mouth**, which can lead to **oral infections** and **tooth decay**.
- **Oral cancer** has a high mortality rate with the 5-year survival rate is below 50 %. If detected early, the 5-year survival increases dramatically to 80 %.
- Oral health of older adults with **dementia** declines as their dementia progresses, due to poor oral hygiene and reliance on others.
- **End-of-life** oral care treatments need to focus on improving **oral comfort** and be consistent with the older adult's end-of-life care **wishes**.



References and resources: www.rgpc.ca

Primary Care Oral Health of Older Adults Resource Kit

