

Benefits Spotlight

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Why Oral Health Needs Change as You Age

Older adults (age 65 or older) typically have more complex health care needs than when they were younger. They take more medications, are at risk for developing chronic illness and may struggle doing certain activities that were once effortless (such as holding a toothbrush).

Plus, with many older adults being retired, that means they no longer have employer-sponsored dental insurance, so some people stop scheduling their twice-yearly preventive oral health care visits.

These factors lead to oral health problems that increase with age, including tooth decay, periodontal (gum) disease and tooth loss. Also, there's a clear link between your overall and oral health—dental issues may be a sign of a larger medical problem (and vice versa), so it's essential to not let your oral health fall to the backburner as you age.

A Closer Look: Special Considerations for Seniors' Oral Health Care

Older adults often live with more complex and chronic health issues. What does this have to do with oral health? Certain conditions (such as diabetes or Alzheimer's disease) and medications cause dry mouth, which promotes the bacteria growth that leads to tooth decay and gum disease. Your dentist can share lifestyle habits that can help you combat dry mouth without disrupting your medical treatment regimen.

Some chronic joint conditions, such as arthritis, can also affect your ability to hold and use small tools—like a manual toothbrush and dental floss. Brushing and flossing are the foundations of at-home dental care, and if you're not able to do them comfortably, you may stop doing them altogether. Visiting a dentist twice a year will not only provide a much-needed cleaning and exam, but your dentist will share products designed with special dexterity needs in mind, such as a larger electric toothbrush or water flosser, to enable you to maintain daily dental hygiene.

If you or a loved one finds that some aspects of dental hygiene, such as brushing and flossing, are becoming more difficult to do or remember, talk to your dentist about how to make them easier. Also, if preventive dental cleanings have become more taxing or painful as you've gotten older, ask your dentist what options he or she has to make them more accommodating.

Overall, seeing your dentist twice a year not only provides valuable cleaning and preventive oral exams that increase in importance as you age, it also offers you the opportunity to get advice on how to make your daily routines easier, more comfortable and more effective.

Delta Dental of Iowa Is Your Oral Health Ally in All Life Stages

Medicare Part C (also known as Medicare Advantage) offers some dental coverage, and the Annual Election Period (AEP) to sign up for the plan begins soon—running October 15 to December 7 each year.

However, most Medicare plans do not cover the majority dental procedures, which can come at a big cost without the proper planning. Delta Dental of Iowa offers affordable individual plans to help maintain your good dental health throughout all your life stages. Visiting the dentist as you age can help prevent or detect some of the biggest oral health issues as early as possible, including oral cancer and periodontal disease.

Visit us online or call our Customer Service at 800-544-0718 to compare our plans to find the best one for your budget and your long-term oral needs.

Sources

<https://www.ada.org/en/member-center/oral-health-topics/aging-and-dental-health>

<https://www.medicare.gov/coverage/dental-services> <https://www.deltadentalia.com/a-healthy-life/insurance/dental-insurance-options-for-retirees/>

What Really Happens During a Vision Exam?

Eye exams largely seek to accomplish two things: 1) evaluate your vision and 2) check for eye problems or diseases. But eye exams can vary—and sometimes, the differences start with what type of eye clinician you see.

There Are Different Types of Eye Care Professionals?

If you're scheduling an eye appointment, do you know what kind of eye clinician you're seeing? There are two types of eye care providers:

- 1. Ophthalmologists:** Ophthalmologists are medical doctors, so they not only provide exams and prescribe corrective vision treatments, but they can diagnose and treat eye diseases. They may also perform eye surgery.
- 2. Optometrists:** Optometrists have earned a doctor of optometry degree, and they can diagnose and treat many common eye problems while providing preventive eye care through eye exams. However, if you have a complex eye problem, an optometrist may refer you to an ophthalmologist for diagnosis and treatment.

You may have heard of a third type of eye care professional—opticians. Because opticians are not doctors, they are unable to provide eye exams. However, they do help customers obtain proper vision through fitting, assembling and selling contact lenses and glasses.

What Tests Should I Expect During My Eye Exam?

If you have no known eye problems and have scheduled your eye exam for preventive purposes, you'll likely undergo a series of basic tests to measure the health of your eyes and vision.

To see how sharp and clear your vision is, your doctor will perform a visual acuity test. If your visual acuity is measured at 20/20, that means you have normal vision. If your visual acuity is abnormal, it may indicate a need for glasses or contacts.

Beyond measuring the clarity of your vision, our eye doctor will evaluate the overall health of your eyes in several ways, such as taking your eye pressure (which screens for glaucoma), assessing your eye muscle health, and examining the front and inside your eye. Your doctor uses special lights to illuminate your eyes, and your doctor may give you eye drops to dilate your eyes so that he or she can better see inside of your eye.

If you have a family or personal history of eye disease, or take medications that affect your vision, your doctor may opt to perform additional tests to ensure any complex eye diseases for which you have an increased risk are detected as early as possible.

Eye Exams: Tips for Success

Like all preventive care, regular eye exams are among the best things you can do to prevent complex eye problems from taking a major toll on your life. How regularly you should get eye exams depends on many factors, so talk to your eye care provider about how often you should schedule your preventive eye exams.

To make the most of your eye exam, make sure to bring any vision correcting lenses you use—glasses and/or contacts—and be prepared to answer some questions about your medical history. Also, write down any concerns you have (e.g. blurred vision, contact lens discomfort, glasses that aren't fitting well), so you leave your appointment knowing your good eye health is well within sight.



Sources

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/eye-exam/about/pac-20384655>

<https://www.webmd.com/eye-health/eye-doctors-optometrists-ophthalmologists>