

Healthy You

FAST FACTS FOR YOUR HEALTH

Aging and Oral Health: 3 At-home Dental Care Tips

Since your first tooth appeared as an infant, you've heard the long-held dental advice: Brush and floss your teeth twice a day, every day. But as you age, those seemingly simple acts can become more challenging.

Making matters worse is that aging brings heightened risks for many oral health problems. Dry mouth, tooth sensitivity, gum disease, tooth decay—these are just a few of the dental conditions that are common in older adults.

But here's the good news: At-home dental hygiene and twice-yearly dental visits are effective at preventing many oral health conditions. If you're struggling with maintaining your brushing and flossing routine, these three tips will help make it easier.

Tip 1: Find a comfortable flossing product. Why are brushing and flossing the perfect pair for at-home dental care? Because brushing, although excellent at cleaning the surface of teeth, isn't as effective at cleaning between teeth. This is where flossing comes in. But many older adults struggle with string floss, as dexterity issues can make holding and maneuvering string floss challenging. String floss can also cause pain when pressed against sensitive gums.

Fortunately, flossing can be accomplished with more than traditional string floss nowadays. Water flossers offer a gentler, easier alternative to cleaning between teeth if string floss is uncomfortable or difficult. However, it's important to understand that these benefits come at a cost: A water flossing system is much more expensive than a simple carton of string floss.

Tip 2: An electric toothbrush may provide an easier, better clean. Manual toothbrushes are a cost-conscious option, but they can be hard to grip and use effectively if you have joint pain or dexterity problems. Electric toothbrushes are a dentist favorite for providing a deep clean on the surfaces on your teeth. Because they're "powered," electric toothbrushes do a lot of the scrubbing and cleaning without requiring much effort from you. Electric toothbrushes have exploded onto the market in recent years, so there are many options to choose from at virtually every price point. Your dentist can help you sort through the clutter and recommend a reputable product for you.

Tip 3: Consider adding mouthwash to your routine. Along with brushing and flossing, a few swishes of an antibacterial mouthwash can keep plaque-causing bacteria at bay. This can help lower your chance of developing gum disease.

A Final Word: Keep Your Twice-Yearly Dental Visits on the Calendar

At-home dental care is crucial to maintaining your good oral health, but it's not a substitute for your twice-yearly dental visits. These appointments aren't simply to give your teeth a deep clean—they are an opportunity for you to discuss questions or concerns with your dentist. If you wear dentures, your dentist will also share the best ways to care for your dentures. Plus, having preventive dental exams every 6 months ensures that disease is detected at the early stage, when it can be treated before it becomes a larger problem.

If you have questions about dental care and insurance as you age, Delta Dental of Iowa breaks down the benefits and costs of dental insurance for seniors and retirees [here](#).

SOURCES

<https://www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/life-stages/oral-care-age-55-up/oral-care-tips-for-older-adults-0213>

<https://www.agingcare.com/articles/oral-health-tips-for-dementia-caregivers-203144.htm>

<https://www.thespectrum.com/story/news/local/mes-quite/2018/10/29/savvy-senior-tips-buying-electronic-toothbrush/1732605002/>

Thirst-quenching Treat: Blackberry-mint Infused Water

As springtime in Iowa approaches, having a few go-to warm weather recipes will keep you cool and refreshed as temperatures climb. With just a few simple ingredients, this blackberry-mint infused water will make getting your eight daily glasses of water effortless and more delicious.

Blackberry-mint infused water

Ingredients:

- A handful of fresh blackberries
- 4 to 5 fresh mint leaves
- Water

Directions:

1. Using a long-handled wooden spoon, gently mash the blackberries in a pitcher, releasing their juices.
2. Rub the mint leaves in your hands to release their oils and place them in the pitcher.
3. Add water and refrigerate for at least two hours, or overnight for fuller flavor.
4. Add more blackberries and mint for stronger flavor.



Fresh mint helps freshen breath, and blackberries have antibacterial properties that can kill bacteria in your mouth. But the real oral health hero in this recipe is water, which boasts several benefits for your teeth and mouth.

Eating and Drinking for Oral Health: Why Water?

Hydration is central to good oral health, so it's hard to overstate the benefits of water to your teeth, mouth and gums.

A simple drink of water after a meal cleans your teeth and breath, and it can wash away food and acid that stick to your teeth. If food and acid remain on your teeth too long, they can activate the bacteria that lead to tooth decay.

Water helps prevent dry mouth, which raises your risk of several oral health conditions, including cavities and gum disease.

The fluoride found in tap water also prevents cavities by reinforcing your enamel, the hard, outer layer of your teeth.

Water boasts a wealth of health benefits, all without containing sugar, calories or acid. No drink hydrates your body as well as water, so raise a glass—simple from the tap or infused with blackberries and mint—to your good oral health.