

Preventing Dental Problems for Omaha Seniors

As everyone ages so, too, do their teeth; making them more prone to gum disease, tooth decay, and more. For many seniors, going to a dental appointment can be a burden because of transportation or mobility issues. At FirstLight HomeCare of Omaha our senior caregivers can either take you to the dentist or arrange for a mobile dentist to come to you. Either way, it is important that you visit a dentist ... no excuses!

If our eyes are the windows to our soul, our mouth is a mirror to our overall health. If you want to be a healthy senior, still playing golf, bridge and tennis well into your later years, it's important not to neglect your oral health!

Here are some of the problems we may face with our teeth as we get older:

- **Darker teeth.** Often the foods we eat or the drinks we consume can turn our teeth darker over time, particularly coffee and tea.
- **Dry mouth.** As we age, our saliva flow is reduced, which can result in dry mouth. It can also be a side effect of chemotherapy, certain medications, or Sjögren's syndrome.
- **Diminished taste.** Foods may not taste as good as they once did.
- **Gum disease.** Not brushing, flossing and having an annual examination can make you more predisposed to gingivitis, periodontitis, and other gum diseases.
- **Tooth loss.** If you don't receive treatment for gum disease, it will inevitably lead to tooth loss.
- **Denture induced stomatitis.** If dentures are ill-fitting or if there is a buildup of the fungus *Candida albican* in the mouth, the tissue under the denture can become severely inflamed.
- **Thrush.** Certain illnesses or medication (antibiotics) can lead to an overgrowth of bacteria in the mouth.

How Your Dental Health Affects Your Overall Health

Researchers have found there is a direct correlation between certain illnesses and oral symptoms. Poor oral health is linked to heart disease, arthritis, osteoporosis, liver disease, anemia, diabetes, HIV and some autoimmune diseases. Ignoring your dental health can lead to bigger problems!

What The Statistics Show

As part of FirstLight HomeCare's personal care services, we can help you with hygiene issues – from brushing your teeth, to bathing to helping you get dressed. Whether you suffer from dental anxiety, or if visiting the dentist simply has not been a priority, we don't want you to become one of the statistics below.

A study by the [National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research reveals](#):

- 23% of seniors 65 and older have not been to the dentist in the last 5 years.
- More Black and Hispanic seniors and those with lower incomes and less education have not been to the dentist in the past 5 years.
- 16% of all seniors 65 and older report that the condition of their teeth and mouth is poor.

- Currently, 1.5 million seniors receive care in 16,700 nursing homes; and 50 to 77 percent of those nursing home residents experience total tooth loss.

Protecting Ourselves From Senior Dental Problems

It's never too late to start practicing good oral hygiene. Here are some tips to help you get started:

- Even if you have no teeth, regular dental visits are essential. Brushing and mouthwash alone can't rid your teeth of the plaque and bacteria you can't see.
- Maybe you are avoiding the dentist because you think dentures are your only option. Not so! Advancements in dentistry have made dental implants and bridges more comfortable than ever before.
- If you have dentures, they need to be adjusted annually. Ill-fitting dentures can lead to poor nutrition because of slippage.
- If you have trouble brushing your teeth because your hands are bad, consider getting an electronic toothbrush.
- If you're at the early stages of periodontal disease, your dentist can prescribe gels or toothpastes that help to combat dental disease in addition to an antibacterial rinse.
- There are more than 400 medications that can contribute to dry mouth. Don't suffer in silence. Your dentist can prescribe specially-formulated toothpastes, oral moisturizers, lubricants, non-alcohol based mouthwashes, or saliva substitutes.

Even lack of money is no excuse for avoiding the dentist. If you are a senior on a limited or fixed income and can't afford regular dental care, many dentists offer their services at reduced fees through dental society-sponsored assistance programs.

At FirstLight HomeCare of Omaha, we care about your health – all of your health.