**The Elederly**

**Brush and Floss Daily**

[Brushing](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/b/brushing-your-teeth) and [flossing](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/f/flossing) your [teeth](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/t/tooth) is just as important for you as it is for your grandchildren. Even though it may have been years since you’ve had a cavity, your risk of [cavities](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/c/cavities) increases with age. One of the reasons is dry mouth—a common side effect of many prescription medications.

Brush your teeth twice a day with [fluoride](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/f/fluoride) toothpaste. Choose a toothbrush with soft bristles and a small head to get to those hard to reach areas. Replace your toothbrush every three or four months, or sooner if the bristles becomes frayed. If you have arthritis or other condition that limits movement, try an electric toothbrush.

Clean between teeth daily with floss. If floss is too difficult to work with, try a floss pick or tiny brushes made specifically to clean between teeth.

 **Clean Dentures Daily**

Bacteria stick to your teeth and also to full or partial dentures. If you wear dentures, remember to clean them on a daily basis with cleaners made specifically for dentures. Do not use toothpastes for natural teeth or household cleaners, which are too abrasive and can damage dentures that can be expensive to replace.

Take your dentures out of your mouth for at least four hours every 24 hours to keep the lining of your mouth healthy. It’s best to remove your full or partial dentures at night. Your dentist will provide you with instructions about how long your dentures should be worn each day.

**Visit a Dentist Regularly**

Get regular dental checkups at least once a year – please do not wait until you have pain. Why? As you age, the nerves inside your teeth become smaller and less sensitive. By the time you feel pain from a [cavity](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/c/cavities), it may be too late and you may lose your tooth. There are also more serious conditions that your dentist will look for, like [oral cancer](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/o/oral-cancer) and [gum disease](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/g/gum-disease), which do not always cause pain until the advanced stages of the disease. By then, it’s more difficult and costly to treat.

When you go to your dentist for a check-up bring the following information:

* List of medications, including vitamins, herbal remedies, and over-the-counter medications
* List of medical conditions and allergies
* Information and phone numbers of all health care providers, doctors, and your previous dentist
* Information about your emergency contacts, someone who can help make decisions on your behalf in the case of a medical emergency
* Dental insurance or Medicaid cards
* Your dentures or partials, even if you don’t wear them

Be sure to talk with your dentist about how to properly secure and dispose of any unused, unwanted or expired medications, especially if there are any children in the household. Also, take the time to talk with your children and/or grandchildren about the dangers of using prescription drugs for non-medical purposes.

**Drink Water with Fluoride**

No matter what age you are, drinking water with [fluoride](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/f/fluoride) helps prevent tooth [decay](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/d/decay). Fluoride is nature’s [cavity](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/c/cavities) fighter. Many community water systems contain added fluoride, but if you prefer bottled water, check the label because some do not contain fluoride. And, some home water filters remove fluoride from the tap water.

**Quit Smoking**

It’s never too late to [quit smoking](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/s/smoking-and-tobacco). Smoking increases problems with [gum disease](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/g/gum-disease), tooth [decay](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/d/decay) and tooth loss. It also slows down healing after dental procedures and can decrease the success rate of [dental implants](http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/i/Implants). Talk to your dentist about quitting.