



## Senior Oral Health

Almost 250 million people or about 40 percent of the adult population in Europe, USA and Japan are estimated to suffer from some form of edentulousness, or loss of natural teeth.[1] Incidence of tooth loss generally increases with age. While the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) reports the prevalence of both partial and total tooth loss in seniors has decreased from the early 1970s, seniors over age 65 have lost an average of 13 teeth (including wisdom teeth) and 26% of seniors over age 65 have no remaining teeth.[2]

Whether caring for natural teeth or dentures, seniors face a range of special oral concerns, including root decay and periodontal disease. You can keep your smile healthy by following a routine of proper oral care and making regular visits to your registered dental hygienist and dentist.

If you have arthritis or limited use of your hands, try adapting the toothbrush for easy use. Insert the handle into a rubber ball or sponge hair curler; or glue the toothbrush handle into a bicycle grip. Toothbrush handles can be lengthened with a piece of wood or plastic such as a ruler, ice cream bar stick or tongue depressor.

For people who have dexterity problems and cannot use a manual toothbrush, an electric toothbrush may be easier to use and increase effectiveness. Numerous studies confirm that electric brushes are excellent plaque removing devices and are extremely effective in stimulating gums. Dental floss holders are also available.

Among other benefits, daily brushing and flossing protect older smiles from two common problems of getting older: **Root decay**--a condition that affects older adults if a great amount of root surfaces are exposed--and tooth **decay caused** by the weakening or chipping of older fillings.

### Denture care and cleaning

Dentures—full or partial—should be brushed daily with a soft toothbrush or denture cleaning brush, using a commercially prepared denture powder or paste, hand soap, or baking soda. Toxic or abrasive household cleaners should never be used. Dentures should be brushed inside and outside, and rinsed with cool water.

Remaining natural teeth and gums, especially those teeth supporting a partial denture, should also be brushed.

When not in use, dentures should be covered with water or a denture cleaning solution to prevent drying.

1. <http://www.astratechdental.com/Library/396636.pdf>, retrieved 6/2008, Astra Zeneca, 2005

2. <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/DataStatistics/FindDataByTopic/ToothLoss/ToothLossSeniors65andOlder>,  
retrieved 6/2008 NIDCR, 2008