

HOW ORAL HEALTH AFFECTS OLDER ADULTS' OVERALL HEALTH

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Caregivers provide crucial support for others in need, such as a child, an aging parent, a husband or wife, a friend or a neighbor. They may perform a range of activities, such as providing companionship, assisting with housework, cooking and assisting with eating, bathing, or providing medical and other forms of physical care, including oral health care.

ACCORDING TO THE AARP PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE:

34.2 million Americans have provided unpaid care to older adults, which equates to **\$470 billion annually**

Approximately 75% of caregivers are female, spending an average of **24.4 hours per week** providing care¹



Providing assistance and maintaining oral health is vital for an individual's overall health and quality of life allowing them to maintain their oral health longer in life. Below is information that can impact your loved one's well-being and oral health along with ways you can help.

FACT

High blood sugar, which is an effect of diabetes, can lead to gum infection.²

Severe gum disease, also called periodontitis, hinders the body's ability to use insulin. Diabetes reduces the body's resistance to infection, putting the gums at risk. Good oral care in addition to regular dental checkups can help prevent this condition.

HOW TO HELP ▶ Ask your loved one's dental professional about special toothpaste or mouthwash to help prevent tooth decay and gum disease.¹

FACT

Maintaining good oral hygiene is a powerful weapon against heart attacks, strokes and other heart disease conditions.³

Research suggests that heart disease, clogged arteries and stroke might be linked to the inflammation and infections that oral bacteria can cause.

HOW TO HELP ▶ Remember to include oral care when creating your daily caregiver plan.

A CAREGIVER'S GUIDE

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FACT

Certain medications can have a negative effect on a patient's oral health.⁴

Certain medications, such as decongestants, antihistamines, painkillers, diuretics and antidepressants, can reduce saliva flow. Saliva washes away food and neutralizes acids produced by bacteria in the mouth, helping to protect from microbes that might lead to disease.

HOW TO HELP ▶ Give your loved one sugarless gum or candy to increase saliva flow.

FACT

A healthy mouth helps people eat well, avoid pain, reduce tooth loss and feel good about themselves.⁵

Infection, pain and missing teeth are some dental problems that affect the ability to chew food and may cause possible digestive issues down the line. Missing teeth may also affect a person's self-esteem and willingness to smile.

HOW TO HELP ▶ Encourage oral health care and help your loved one brush their teeth and schedule regular dental visits for them.

FACT

Certain medical conditions, such as arthritis in the hands and fingers, may make brushing or flossing teeth difficult or impossible to perform.⁶

Certain medical conditions can greatly decrease the dexterity of an individual. Holding a toothbrush or floss may become a huge or impossible task.

HOW TO HELP ▶ Wrapping the toothbrush with a towel or purchasing an electric toothbrush with a thicker handle can aid in this problem.

RESOURCES:

¹ Family Caregiver Alliance: National Center on Caregiving. "Caregiver Statistics: Demographics." www.caregiver.org/caregiver-statistics-demographics

² Mayo Clinic. "Oral Health: A Window to Your Overall Health." www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/dental/art-20047475

³ Colgate. "How Oral Health and Heart Disease are Connected." www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/conditions/heart-disease/how-oral-health-and-heart-disease-are-connected-0115

⁴ Colgate. "Medication Side Effects Can Affect Your Oral Health." www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/life-stages/adult-oral-care/ada-06-medications-side-effects

⁵ National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. "Dental Care Everyday: Caregiver Guide." www.nidcr.nih.gov/sites/default/files/2017-09/dental-care-every-day-caregiver.pdf

⁶ National Institute on Aging. "Taking Care of Your Teeth and Mouth." www.nia.nih.gov/health/taking-care-your-teeth-and-mouth

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