

# Oral Health

## Improving Your Health with Oral Care

**Your overall health and your oral health are closely linked. As you age, your risk of having poor oral health increases. Infections in your teeth and the structures supporting them, like your gums, can increase risks for many illnesses. These include heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and stroke as well as infections like pneumonia. In turn, these illnesses and some medicines may increase risks to your oral health.**

Older adults with disability, cognitive impairment, visual problems, arthritis, or dry mouth are more likely to have poor oral health.

Most older adults have some type of oral health problem. These problems may cause you pain, tooth and bone loss, difficulty with eating, malnutrition, infections, and changes in your overall health. Also, you may feel embarrassment and anxiety about your appearance and smile, which could affect your willingness to socialize with others.

Fortunately, you can take steps to help prevent these problems and improve your oral health.

### Prevent Oral Health Problems

You may be able to prevent poor oral health if you:

- Brush your teeth thoroughly twice a day
- Use dental aids or adaptive dental tools (electric toothbrush, flossing/water flossing)
- Get treatment for decay and other infections in your mouth
- Get dental screenings and exams
- Talk to your doctor about some of the medications you are on. Some may cause darkened teeth, dry mouth, or other conditions, and may require a change in dental treatment.

### Get Oral Health Services

The federal Community Health Center program provides preventive dental services to people with little access to care.

Centers must provide care to people of all ages on a sliding fee scale based on their ability to pay. About 1,400 health centers operate some 10,000 service delivery sites in every U.S. state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the Pacific Basin. [Locate a health center.](#)

Find additional information about [government resources available through the Health Resources and Services Administration \(HRSA\).](#)

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**Many older adults with low incomes say they do not visit the dentist routinely because of the expense.**

## **Get Oral Health Services**

You may not get the dental care you need because you cannot afford it or do not have access to programs that provide it.

Medicare generally does not cover dental care, but if you are a member of a Medicare Advantage plan, you may have access to some dental services. The Medicaid program in many states and Community Health Centers may help you get the care you need.

Medicaid adult dental benefits vary widely from state to state. Some states offer services only during emergencies while others cover preventive services and dentures. Some states choose to provide dental benefits through special programs that offer supportive services in a person's home.

[Check out your state's Medicaid program.](#)