

# Supporting our Senior Citizens



Alex at 96 had many of his adult teeth

Alex kept many of his adult teeth well into his 90's and enjoyed a full and active social life – even if he wasn't quite as mobile as he once was. So while older age can bring a variety of dental health problems – with the correct support these can be managed.

Older age can bring a range of oral health problems that include:

- **Darkened teeth.** Caused, to some extent, by changes in dentin, the bone like tissue that underlies the tooth enamel, and by a lifetime of consuming stain-causing foods and beverages.
- **Dry mouth.** Dry mouth is caused by reduced saliva flow, which can be a result of cancer treatments that use radiation to the head and neck area, as well as certain diseases, such as Sjögren's syndrome, and medications.
- **Diminished sense of taste.** While advancing age impairs the sense of taste, diseases, medications and dentures can also contribute to this sensory loss.
- **Root decay.** This is caused by exposure of the tooth root to decay-causing acids. The tooth roots become exposed as gum tissue recedes from the tooth.
- **Gum disease.** Caused by plaque and made worse by food left in teeth, use of tobacco products, poor-fitting bridges and dentures, poor diets, and certain diseases, such as anaemia, cancer and diabetes, this is often a problem for older adults.
- **Tooth loss.** Gum disease is a leading cause of tooth loss.
- **Uneven jawbone.** This is caused by tooth loss.
- **Denture-induced stomatitis.** Ill-fitting dentures, poor dental hygiene or a build-up of the fungus Candida albicans cause this condition, which is inflammation of the tissue underlying a denture.
- **Thrush.** Diseases or medicines that affect the immune system can trigger the overgrowth of the fungus Candida albicans in the mouth.

Naturally enough, medical conditions which are more common in older age, such as arthritis in the hands and fingers, may make brushing or flossing teeth harder; this in turn affects oral health.

## Our oral hygiene tips for older people

Daily brushing and flossing of your natural teeth is essential to keep them in good health. Plaque can build up quickly on the teeth of older folk, especially if oral hygiene is neglected, and lead to tooth decay and gum disease. To maintain good oral health, it's important for all individuals, regardless of age, to:

- Brush at least twice a day with a fluoride-containing toothpaste
- Floss at least once a day
- Use a fluoride-containing mouthwash after meals – or plain water at a minimum
- Visit us regularly for cleaning (by Karen – our hygienist) and an oral examination (by Edvina – our Principal Dentist)

So, if you are new to the area, have a particular concern, or are in any way anxious – you are very welcome to come on in and talk to us. **Call 01295 709500** – we are here to help you.

## What older people can expect during a dental examination

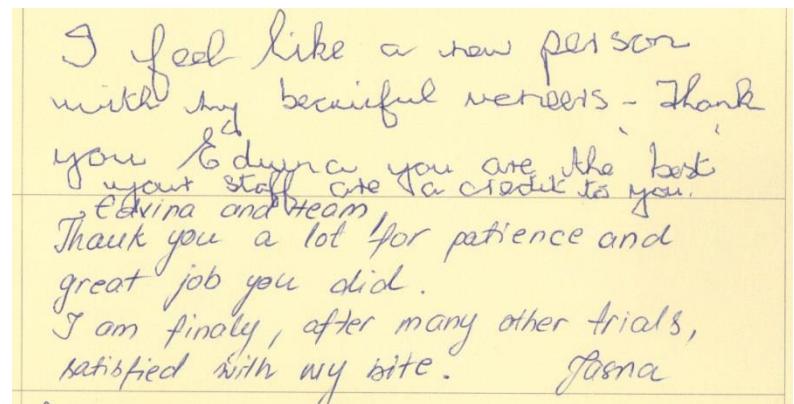
This is a guide to help senior citizens know what to expect.

We will conduct a thorough history and dental examination for all new patients. Questions asked during your dental history will include:

- The approximate date of your last dental visit and reason for the visit
- If you have noticed any recent changes in your mouth
- If you have noticed any loose or sensitive teeth
- If you have noticed any difficulty tasting, chewing, or swallowing
- If you have any pain, discomfort, sores, or bleeding in your mouth
- If you have noticed any lumps, bumps, or swellings in your mouth

During an oral examination, we will check the following:

- your face and neck (for skin discolouration, moles, sores);
- your bite (for any problems in how your teeth come together while opening and closing your mouth);
- your jaw (for signs of clicking and popping in the temporo-mandibular joint<sup>1</sup>);
- your lymph nodes and salivary glands (for any sign of swelling or lumps);
- your inner cheeks (for infections, ulcers, traumatic injuries);
- your tongue and other interior surfaces, floor of the mouth, soft and hard palate, gum tissue (for signs of infection or other problems)
- your teeth (for decay, condition of fillings, and cracks).
- and we are likely to take an X-ray to check for unseen problems



If you wear dentures or other appliances, we will ask you a few questions about when you wear your dentures and when you take them out (if removable). We will also look for any irritation or problems in the areas in the mouth that the appliance touches, and examine the denture or appliance itself (looking for any worn or broken areas).

Remember: you are not alone without understanding or support – we help many of our senior patients regain confidence and their smiles.

Come to our **ground floor surgery** for an informal chat: **Call 01295 709500** – we are here to help you.

<sup>1</sup> The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is the hinge joint that connects the lower jaw (mandible) to the temporal bone of the skull, which is immediately in front of the ear on each side of your head.