

Age and Periodontal Disease



People who are over the age of 55 have an increased risk of developing periodontal disease. In fact, if you are 55 or older, you have a greater than 50 percent chance of having periodontitis as well.

What are the risk factors that make older people susceptible to periodontal disease? Some of them don't have anything to do with age, which holds out hope for the idea that if you take care of yourself, you may be able to avoid developing periodontitis successfully.

Specifically, the risk factors include the following.

General Health

If you take care of yourself and are healthy, you are less likely to suffer from periodontitis.

Our bodies consist of interconnected systems. Logically enough, many diseases that affect your general health will also affect your dental health.

For example, if you have diabetes or osteoporosis — two diseases that, like periodontal disease, are associated with aging — they increase the chances that you will also develop periodontal disease.

Unfortunately, there isn't a way to prevent type 1 diabetes. The same is not true for type 2 diabetes, which is associated with your lifestyle choices and, even more specifically, with your weight. As for osteoporosis, you can do a great deal to prevent it by eating correctly, doing weight-bearing exercise, and taking supplements. Getting a regular bone-density screening can also be helpful because it gives you useful information about how your bones are doing and whether you need to make changes in your life to improve the health of your bones.

In addition to their other symptoms, women who are perimenopausal or postmenopausal can also find that they are experiencing dental changes as their hormone production decreases. These symptoms can involve pain or a burning sensation in the gums, changes in how food tastes, receding gums, and dry mouth. Estrogen supplements may help, especially if you start within five years of menopause.

Your Immune System

If your immune system is faltering for other reasons, that might affect your dental health as well. Someone with arthritis will have a harder time brushing and flossing correctly, which puts that person's dental health at risk.

A Faltering Memory and Impaired Abilities

It is hard to take care of your teeth correctly if you can't remember whether you have brushed, flossed, and used mouthwash. It is also hard if you can't hold and maneuver a brush correctly.

Medications and Reduced Saliva Production

Medications sometimes have side effects. For example, medications for osteoporosis can have a negative effect on the bones in your jaw, or on the amount of saliva you produce. This includes over-the-counter medications and herbal supplements. Some possible culprits include antidepressants, decongestants, diuretics, drugs to reduce high blood pressure, and other medications.

Reduced saliva production is a common problem for the elderly anyway, and may happen just because you are sick. No matter what the reason is, though, not having enough saliva affects the pH balance in your mouth and makes it less acidic. Saliva also makes it easier for you to swallow, and it is part of the digestive process. As a result, there is a real problem if you are not producing enough of it. A dentist or special-

ist can recommend ways to increase saliva production; these include gum, mouth rinses, and artificial saliva products.

Poverty

Getting appropriate medical and dental care takes time and money. Only you can decide how much of a priority your health is, especially if you are struggling to pay your bills. However, neglecting your teeth can have a devastating and highly visible result if it goes on long enough. There is no getting around the fact that severe periodontal disease impacts your quality of life.

Dentists are often willing to work with their patients when it comes to payment. It is worth talking to find out what you can do. You may be happily surprised at the result.

Neglect and Depression

Your gums are going to recede as you age. When they do, the roots of your teeth are exposed, increasing the risk of developing cavities and periodontal disease. You can do a great deal to prevent problems by brushing and flossing correctly every day after you eat. You can also protect your teeth by having them cleaned professionally twice a year.

Neglect has a drastic, negative effect on your dental health. If you neglect your health because you are depressed, that can be a hard cycle to break. This is a problem that may require professional help.

Taking Care of Yourself

Communicate with your dentist or periodontist about your specific challenges and circumstances, and it may be possible to implement helpful preventive measures that will safeguard your oral health. With good preventive care and regular professional attention, including periodontal evaluations, you may well be able to keep your teeth in good shape for the rest of your life.

With good preventive care and regular professional attention, including periodontal evaluations, you may well be able to keep your teeth in good shape for the rest of your life.

