

Oral Inspection *tips for* Caregivers

Not all seniors will verbally express pain or discomfort with their mouth, even though they may have a serious issue. It is important to perform a visual oral inspection of the mouth to look for any trouble signs. Dental disease is preventable and can be minimized with early intervention.

Remember:

- Before getting started remember to wear gloves to prevent cross-contamination.
- Use a flashlight to get a better view inside the mouth.
- Ask if it is okay to look inside the senior's mouth. Engage them in the process by letting them know what you are doing.
- Check the mouth closely and consistently. It will be easier to spot changes in the mouth if you look in the mouth regularly. Watch for anything abnormal: swelling, red or white patches, gums that have changed colour or sores that do not heal in a few days.
- Discuss any concerns with a dental professional. If a senior is experiencing any pain or infection, contact a dentist.
- Visit the dentist regularly (at least annually).

Important! This tip sheet is intended as a tool to help caregivers support good oral health. If you spot an issue or are unsure if what you are seeing is normal, check with a dental professional.



A healthy older mouth with some staining. The gums are pink and moist. The teeth are free from debris and plaque.



A series of photos featuring a sinus (demonstrates an abscess is present), dry tissues and decay, decayed and broken teeth.

Visit yourdentalhealth.ca for more information and to view an online educational video.

Performing an Oral Inspection

Healthy **lips** should be smooth, pink and moist.
Look for dryness, lumps, cracked corners, inflammation or abnormal colour.

A **healthy tongue** should be pink and moist.
Look for patchy, white coating or any redness or swelling.

Healthy **gums and tissues** should be pink, moist, smooth and free from bleeding.
Look for any ulcers, sores, swelling, redness or bleeding. Remove dentures to inspect the surface of the mouth for any hidden irritations.

Healthy **teeth** should be clean and free from food debris, plaque and decay.
Look for worn down teeth, decay (black or brown spots) or cracks.

Dentures should be clean, well-fitting and intact.
Look for any cracks, breaks, worn areas, and overall cleanliness. Inspect the tissues under the dentures for any signs of irritation.

Also Note:

Overall cleanliness: Check the mouth for any food particles or dental plaque.

Reduced saliva: Saliva is extremely important for a healthy mouth. It helps to remove bacteria. The lack of saliva can increase tooth decay and gum disease and can cause discomfort. Look for reduced saliva.

Pain: Ask the senior if they are experiencing any pain in their mouth and have them show you where it hurts. Do you notice any issues?



An unhealthy, 'patchy' tongue.



An unhealthy mouth.
The gums are red while the teeth show a buildup of plaque.



A broken denture shows a tooth missing.

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