

# Plan to keep your teeth—before and after retirement



Good oral health is part of your overall health and vitality, supporting nutrition and self-esteem. Plan to enjoy better oral health for life with ongoing care and prevention, including regular dental examinations.

British Columbians are keeping their teeth longer. Most adults can expect to enter retirement with all, if not most, of their natural teeth.

However, regular brushing and flossing alone, even with an electric toothbrush, does not guarantee that you'll still be eating apples at 90. Continuing to visit your dentist regularly for professional care after retirement is just as important to keeping your teeth well into old age.

Your mouth ages too. Even the most scrupulously clean mouth will likely end up with some form of gum recession (when your gums shrink and more of your tooth's root is exposed and vulnerable to cavities) or dental disease. For example, 43 percent of adults 60–79 years of age have root cavities compared to 6 percent of adults 20–39 years of age.<sup>1</sup>

Dental conditions are often extensive in older adults and can cause pain, infection and tooth loss. The number of adults without any teeth rises from 4 percent among 40–59-year-olds to 22 percent among 60–79-year-olds.<sup>1</sup> Studies also show that BC adults have a higher combined rate of decayed (cavities), missing and filled teeth.<sup>2</sup>

Losing your natural teeth can affect your nutrition and enjoyment of a variety of foods; lead to slurred speech; and reduce self-esteem. Dental disease can also negatively impact your general health; there are links between poor oral health and other health conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease.

Adults over the age of 60 also have the highest incidence of oral cancer; other risk factors include a high consumption of alcohol and tobacco, especially when combined.<sup>3</sup> Oral cancers can be devastating but are very treatable if caught early; it is estimated that approximately 84 percent of oral cancers can be detected by a dentist.<sup>4</sup>

With planning and ongoing prevention, a 60-year-old can retain their vitality *and* their teeth for a long time.

#### References:

<sup>1</sup>Health Canada. The Canadian Health Measures Survey, Oral Health Component (2010)

<sup>2</sup>The British Columbia Dental Association's 2006 Adult Dental Health Survey; Health Canada. The Canadian Health Measures Survey, Oral Health Component (2010)

<sup>3</sup>Health Canada website (oral cancer)

<sup>4</sup>Canadian Cancer Statistics (2007)

## Steps to oral health...for life

**Keep your teeth, gums and dental work clean & maintained.** Brush daily, especially at bedtime, with a soft toothbrush or electric toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. Please floss! Make sure you floss at least once a day, especially around dental work like crowns.

Speak to your dentist about any special care for your dental work. Your teeth, gums and jaw bones change with age. You may require some repeat procedures or need to have your dental work repaired or replaced well before you are in advanced age.

**Keep up your regular dental exams and cleaning schedule—even after you retire from work.** Plan ahead for all your extended health care needs, including dental care. Consider investing in a private or group plan when you retire, or put aside savings to cover regular preventive care including dental exams and cleanings.

Early detection of oral disease through regular examinations by a dentist can help to stop or slow the progression of oral disease and lead to better outcomes. Your dentist will monitor the health of your soft tissues and teeth; screen for oral cancer; review any general health concerns; and monitor the ongoing fit and function of your dental work.

**Keep it healthy. What's good for your body is good for your mouth!** Limit the amount of sugary foods and drinks you consume throughout the day. Choose nutritious snacks and drinks, such as cheese or nuts, and water. Rinse with water after eating or drinking.

**Keep your dentist or certified specialist up to date.** Your dentist or certified specialist is the doctor of your mouth. Update them on any medications you are taking and/or changes to your health. Many chronic diseases directly affect your teeth, bones and soft oral tissues. For example, some medications can create 'dry mouth' which can increase your risk of decay.

Stay active, stay connected, eat a healthy diet, take care of your teeth—and don't forget about your extended health care needs! Your healthy smile can stay with you...for life.



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For more information on caring for your oral health at any age, talk to your dentist or visit [yourdentalhealth.ca](http://yourdentalhealth.ca).