

# Seniors—save that smile!

Oral health among U.S. seniors has never been better: today's American over age 65 has an average of 18 of his or her own teeth, compared to just seven in 1960. Here are some things to keep in mind to help you maintain a healthy smile:

- Because dental decay is still common among older adults, it is especially important to brush at least twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, particularly at bedtime.
- Some medications or medical conditions can cause dry mouth as a result of a lack of saliva. Saliva has anti-bacterial properties and helps protect against tooth decay. Drinking water, chewing sugarless gum, and sucking on sugarless candy can help restore moisture. A dentist can also recommend mouth rinses or artificial saliva.
- The incidence of gum disease (periodontitis) is greater among older adults; symptoms may include bleeding, tender or swollen gums, loose teeth, and bad breath. Regular flossing, combined with daily brushing, can help minimize or prevent this from happening.
- Receding gums can result in the root of the tooth being exposed and susceptible to decay. Using fluoride toothpaste and mouthrinses can help prevent or reduce cavities on root surfaces.
- The use of tobacco and alcohol can cause tooth-related problems, mask gum inflammation, and increase the risk of developing oral cancer. It's never too late to quit and reduce these risks.

**A daily effort to keep your mouth clean, combined with regular dental visits, can help keep your healthy smile.**

