

A Guide to Dental Care for Seniors

by Dr. Jay Patel

While age doesn't have much to do with oral health, the conditions that come with old age do. Dental care for seniors needs to look a bit different than oral care for any other age.

Arthritis and drugs used for various illnesses can make it harder to brush and floss, and can lead to changes in the mouth that cause problems like gum disease, tooth loss, and root decay. We recommend following these guidelines for a healthy, beautiful smile all throughout your senior years.

Dental Care for Seniors: The Basics

Dental Exams

You should never stop seeing your dentist, no matter how old you are. Visiting the dentist regularly helps patients 65 years and older keep their oral health in check and address problems before they become major issues.

The exam will begin with a discussion of any problems patients been experiencing as well as their health history. Then I will examine their teeth, clean them, and finish by giving them tips for maintenance.

According to the [Canadian Dental Association](#), here's a general checklist of what I will look for during a senior's dental exam.

Basic Checks During a Dental Exam for 65 and older

I will check for:

- Gum disease

- Infection
- Broken teeth
- Cavities
- Signs of oral cancer
- The integrity of your existing fillings or crowns
- Check dentures for function, fit and comfort

Tips and Techniques for Flossing & Brushing

Brushing and flossing are vital to your dental health throughout your life. Maintaining your teeth will keep exams quick and easy.

Brushing

Follow these simple guidelines to get your teeth squeaky-clean.

- Choose a toothbrush size that fits your mouth. It should reach all the way into the back corners. Ideally an electric toothbrush is recommended as it does a better overall clean and works better for those with minimal dexterity.
- Your toothbrush should have soft or ultra soft bristles.
- Brush in gentle circles where your teeth meet your gums. Avoid brushing too hard, as this can contribute to receding gums.
- Brush for at least two minutes to get every cranny and crevice.
- Brush every side of each tooth: front, sides, top, and back.

Flossing

Flossing cleans the areas that your toothbrush can't reach. Gently guide your floss between your teeth and sliding it up and down beneath the gumline. Make sure to curve the floss around the base of each tooth to remove plaque and bits of food. Do not snap or force the floss down as this may cut or bruise the gums.

Oral Care Tips for Family Members or Caregivers

If you find yourself in charge of the oral care of an older friend or family member, there are some tips you can use to make the process easier.

- To brush and floss someone else's teeth, stand behind them with both of you facing a mirror. Use the same motions you would use to brush your own teeth and gums.
- Make sure to ask them to speak up if you're using too much (or not enough) pressure.
- When you're done, have the senior spit out the toothpaste.
- If you need to clean someone else's dentures, ask them to remove them for you. Check the dentures for damage, and brush them with a denture brush.

How to get dental insurance coverage for seniors

If you need assistance covering the cost of your dental care, help is available.

In many cases, health services not covered by the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan (AHCIP) can be paid for by Alberta Blue Cross Coverage for Seniors. This coverage is premium-free and is provided by the Government of Alberta.

You're eligible for Alberta Blue Cross Coverage if you're 65 or older or if you are a recipient of the Alberta Widows' Pension. If you have any eligible dependents, you would receive Family Coverage. Those who qualify for Single Coverage have no dependents.

To register you need to provide proof of your age (for instance, a birth certificate, passport, or naturalization certificate) and income.

In most cases, cleaning, polishing, and exams are covered, as well as fillings, root canals, crowns and dentures.

Dental Care for Seniors is in to Age Care Skypointe

Skypointe Dental has teamed up with Age Care Skypointe to provide dental hygiene care for residents. Maintaining good oral hygiene as you get older is one of the healthiest things you can do for your body.

To help maintain healthy, white smiles for Age Care residents, we will offer cleanings at our dental hygiene booth. Our dental hygienist will remove any tartar that can cause gum disease and will finish off your cleaning with a polish, leaving your teeth feeling smooth.

We are now accepting hygiene appointments at our Age Care Skypointe hygiene clinic. We're happy to direct-bill all insurance plans including Alberta Blue Cross Seniors plan.

To learn more about our services for seniors and our Age Care Skypointe dental hygiene services, or to make an appointment, [please contact our office](#). We will be happy to assist you!

If you need help getting coverage or have general questions, [Skypointe Dental](#) is a Fee Guide Provider for Alberta Blue Cross. We can assist you and/or your family in the registration process.

For a Calgary dental office that will help keep your mouth healthy at every age, including dental care for seniors, count on us at Skypointe Dental