

Newsletter article
Ginny Clarcq, RN

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Dental or oral health is an important component of overall health. Many factors aggravate oral health and contribute to tooth decay and loss. Infrequent or inadequate tooth brushing allows plaque to accumulate along the gum line. If left unattended, bacteria flourish and irritate the gums resulting in redness, swelling and bleeding. This is an early sign of periodontal disease (infection of the gums). Missing teeth or pain from periodontal disease may impact general health, nutrition, sleep, mood and the ability to effectively chew and swallow, all of which influence the quality of life.

It is significant to note that saliva contains properties which bathe the teeth and protect them from bacteria and decay. The amount of saliva produced decreases a bit as we age, and this problem is often compounded by taking medications which cause "dry mouth". Keeping well hydrated and using fluoridated mouthwashes daily may help reduce this problem and lead to better oral health.

In addition, tobacco use increases the risk of periodontal disease and is associated with the development of oral cancers. Being screened on an annual basis for oral cancers is important for all, especially older adults as oral cancers are primarily diagnosed in the elderly.

Conditions which limit a person's sensory and motor functions, such as, Parkinson's disease or stroke, may affect a person's ability to brush their teeth and contribute to inadequate oral care. Physical or mental limitations should not prohibit good oral hygiene. Assistance from a family member or caregiver should be utilized, if necessary, to maintain oral health.

Denture wearers are not excused from paying attention to good oral health. Ill fitting dentures cause irritation of gums and a tendency, therefore, to avoid denture use. As a result, food choices are often reduced to soft foods and fresh food consumption is limited.

Annual dental exams are a necessary part of general health maintenance but may be ignored for several reasons. First, the cost may be prohibitive and insurance may not be an option. Second, for those who don't drive, transportation to the dentist may be difficult or costly to arrange. Third, fear of the dentist may inhibit action.

HESSCO elder services is conducting a dental clinic, April 29th at the Norfolk Senior center from 9am - 1pm. Mark your calendar now and plan to attend if you are unable to afford regular dental exams. A dentist, hygienist, and nutritionist will be on hand to perform an oral assessment, cancer screening and to provide recommendations and education. If follow-up procedures are advised, the names of dentists who have agreed to provide dental care to seniors in need, and at a reduced rate, will be provided.

