

Smilematters

Summer
2001

PATIENT FACT SHEET

www.smilemichigan.com

Lifestyle Issues for the 50-Plus Patient

The fastest-growing segment of the United States population is adults over age 50. We understand that you have special issues that effect your oral health needs. The following information will be of special interest to baby boomers and beyond.

Know Your Medications

Studies show that two out of every five adults take some type of medication that could have dental-related side effects. For example, antihistamines can decrease saliva, leaving your teeth at greater risk for decay and your gums open to inflammation and infection. Some medications have been linked to the development of oral sores. Overgrowth of gum tissue associated with some seizure medications, immunosuppressant drugs, and calcium channel blockers can make good oral hygiene a challenge. Be sure to talk with your dentist about any medications you are taking, including prescriptions and over-the-counter varieties.

Reduced Saliva Flow

Reduced saliva flow that results in a dry mouth is a common problem among older adults. It is caused by certain medical disorders and is often a side effect of medications such as antihistamines, decongestants, pain killers, and diuretics. Some of the common problems associated with dry mouth are a constant sore throat, burning sensation, problems speaking, difficulty swallowing, hoarseness, or dry nasal passages. Left untreated, dry mouth can damage your teeth. Without enough saliva to moisten your mouth, wash away food, and neutralize the acids produced by plaque, extensive cavities can form. Your dentist can recommend various methods to restore moisture.

Reduce Your Risk of Oral Cancer

While your dentist will perform an oral cancer exam during your office visit, you can further protect your-

self from oral cancer by immediately reporting to your dentist any signs of possible concern. These symptoms include a persistent sore that bleeds easily and does not heal; red or white lesions or patches in your mouth; pain; tenderness or numbness in the mouth or lips; a lump, thickening or rough spot; difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking, moving the jaw or tongue; or a change in the way your teeth fit together when you close your mouth. It is important to remember that early detection of oral cancer greatly increases the chance of successful treatment!

In Summary

- Be sure to inform your dentist of any medications you are taking, as well as any changes in medications.
- Try to reduce the amount of foods with sugar that you eat. One suggestion is to eat these foods with meals or to avoid sugary snacks.
- Always be aware of any changes in your oral health, such as a sore that does not heal or a lump or rough spot in your mouth. Report these changes to your dentist right away, as your dentist could be your first line of defense for the early detection of oral cancer.
- Be sure to talk to your dentist if you are experiencing an unusually dry mouth. You may notice a constant sore throat, burning sensation, difficulty swallowing, hoarseness, or dry nasal passages.
- As always, for proper oral health be sure to brush twice daily, floss, eat a well balanced diet and see your dentist regularly. Smile On!