



the burden of oral disease

Older Adults

Oral Disease in Older Adults

Many oral health issues become common as adults age. Complete tooth loss (edentulism) is most common in older adults and is of particular concern for individuals of low socioeconomic status.¹ Periodontal disease is also more common in older adults, primarily due to the disease progressing throughout life.¹ Oropharyngeal cancers are also most commonly diagnosed in adults over the age of 65.¹

The oral health of older adults has many implications for overall health and wellbeing. Tooth loss can reduce chewing ability, and this can decrease diet quality.² This can lead to weight loss or obesity.² Additionally, poor oral health can increase the risk for respiratory infections and pneumonia in older adults.² Periodontal disease has also been shown to have a negative effect on older adults with diabetes, and maintaining good oral hygiene could help prevent cardiovascular disease.²

Risk and Protective Factors for Oral Disease in Older Adults

Many older adults take multiple medications to manage chronic diseases. These medications often cause side-effects such as dry mouth, resulting in an increased risk for dental caries (tooth decay).¹

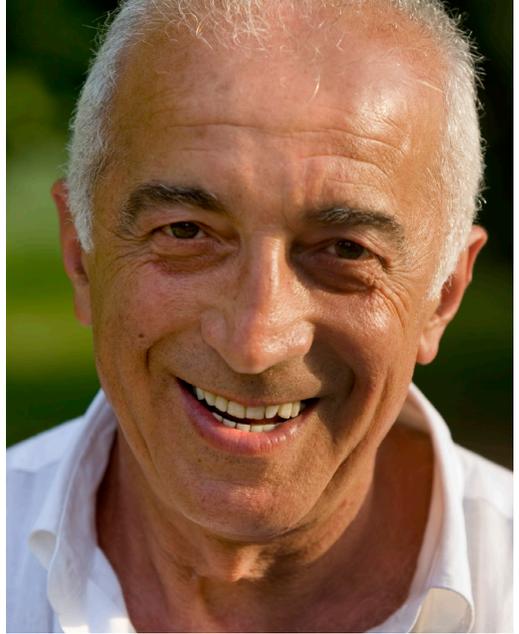
Adults can protect themselves from decay through the use of fluoride, either applied by health care professionals or consumed through fluoridated water systems.² Additionally, periodontal disease can be prevented through professional scaling and root planning by a dental hygienist or dentist.²

Risk factors for oral cancer include tobacco use and excessive alcohol consumption.³ Adults can reduce their risk by avoiding cigarettes, cigars, and smokeless tobacco.³



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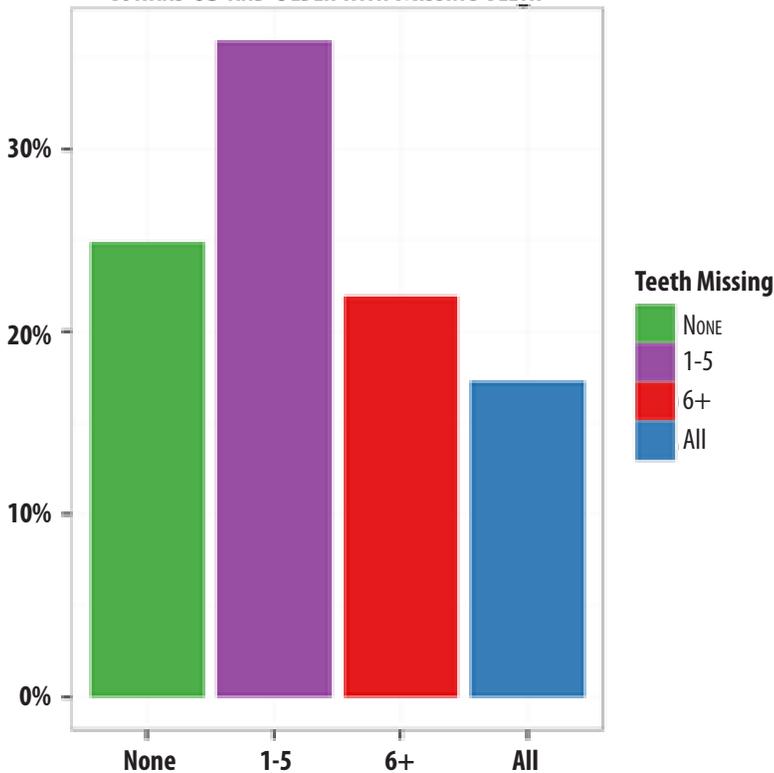
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How is Iowa Doing?

In 2012, 17.3% of Iowa adults aged 65 and over reported that they have had all of their natural teeth removed.⁴ This is slightly worse than the national average of 16.1%.⁴ However, Iowa has met the Healthy People 2020 goal to reduce the proportion of adults aged 65-74 years who have lost all of their natural teeth to 21.6%.⁵ Iowa has been improving on this measure in recent years. In 1999, 23.9% of older Iowans reported that they were without any of their natural teeth.⁴

IOWANS 65 AND OLDER WITH MISSING TEETH



Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey 2012
Includes adults 65 and older by self-reported number of teeth that have been removed.

What is Iowa Doing?

In Iowa, a coalition dedicated to the oral health of older adults was started in 2013. The Lifelong Smiles Coalition is working to increase access to oral health care for older adults in Iowa. Strategies of the coalition include increasing care coordination, providing education to direct care workers, and researching potential policy improvements.⁷

The Iowa Department of Public Health, with funding support from the Delta Dental of Iowa Foundation, has recently initiated a pilot project aimed at improving access to oral health care for older Iowans and improving the dental delivery system. This project, titled I-Smile™ Silver, uses care coordinators to enhance dental referral systems, increase access to care for older adults, and form relationships between dentists and others involved in the care and lives of older adults.⁸

Healthy People 2020 has also made oral cancer a priority. They set the goal to reduce the oropharyngeal cancer death rate to 2.3 deaths per 100,000 population.⁵ The state of Iowa has met this goal, with an annual death rate of 2.2 per 100,000 population over the 2008-2012 time period.⁶ The death rate for adults aged 65 years and older for this same time period was 10.6 deaths per 100,000 population.⁶ This results in an average of 50 oropharyngeal cancer deaths per year for this age group.⁶

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Fact sheet references and additional information can be found at <https://idph.iowa.gov/ohds/oral-health-center/reports>