

## Changes that we may face in older age include:

- retirement
- moving from the family home into a:
  - retirement village
  - hostel or
  - nursing home
- loss of support network [family members, neighbours and friends]
- 'slowing down' and loss of mobility
- loss of independence
- failing health
- increasing need for medications
- less control over what we eat e.g. pre-prepared meals
- diminished manual dexterity, e.g. arthritis, limiting the ability to reach all areas of the mouth with a toothbrush
- loss of spouse.

Your dentist understands that changes to your lifestyle can trigger changes in diet or brushing habits, and that sometimes your dental health may seem less of a priority.

He or she will advise you and assist you in making the necessary alterations to your eating and brushing habits, to help you strengthen your teeth and prevent further decay occurring.

### Further information

*can be obtained from the*

**Dental Practice Education Research Unit  
Dental School, Adelaide University, S.A. 5005**

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## Checklist for you and your dentist REMEMBER

- DON'T use a non-flouride toothpaste
- AVOID sweets and sticky snacks
- LIMIT sugar in your tea and coffee
- LIMIT soft drinks, cordial and fruit drinks
- DON'T suck sweets or lozenges if your mouth feels dry
- DON'T skip regular tooth-brushing
- DON'T put off dental visits

## Checklist for YOU to be filled in by you and your dentist

- brush your teeth with fluoride toothpaste
- use caution when brushing teeth - use a soft- bristled brush, and don't scrub vigorously; avoid abrasion of softened root surfaces
- use a high-strength fluoride toothpaste
- "spit and don't rinse" after brushing
- use an electric toothbrush
- use a toothbrush with specially-shaped handle
- snack wisely or not at all
- cut down on sugar in tea and coffee or use a sugar substitute
- sip water if your mouth feels dry
- clean dentures after meals, and remove overnight
- use additional fluoride (eg fluoride gels or mouthrinse) to strengthen teeth
- make regular dental visits

**Date of your next appointment**

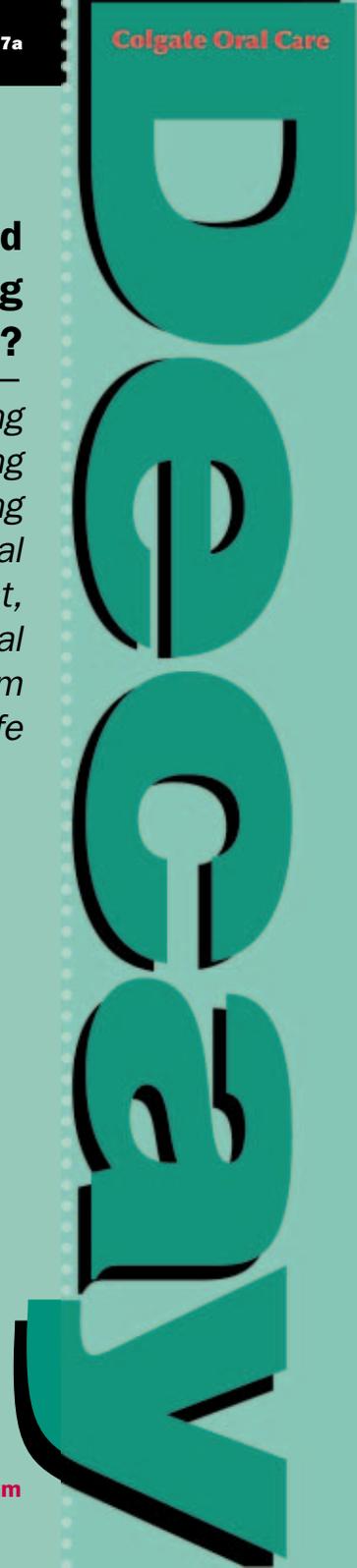
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## What's behind your changing dental problems?

- *eating*
  - *smiling*
  - *talking*
- your own natural teeth are the best, but they need special care to keep them for life*



**Colgate Caries Control Program**



**As we become older we face a time of rapid change. We may retire, move into a smaller home and face changes to our mobility and health.**

**Dental problems also change with aging, but keeping our teeth and gums healthy is vital so that we can eat, smile and talk without discomfort.**

**Our nutrition and overall health is affected by our ability to eat healthy and varied food.**

*For many years you may have had very little trouble with your teeth apart from occasional replacement of fillings that have broken down. There may have been no new decay problems, and your mouth has been in a balanced state. But now your dentist has told you that you have a decay problem that may have become quite serious.*

## **What's changing? . . . Everything.**

Without being aware of any differences in your eating habits, you may have had substantial changes to your meals and what you eat between meals. This can easily occur if you find that you have more free time e.g. to play bridge and nibble sweets and snacks.

Perhaps your enjoyment of food has changed, things taste different, or you have developed a 'sweet tooth'. Many of us turn to food when we are bored, worried, less busy or perhaps less happy than previously.



Figure 1:  
Early stages  
of root decay  
and tooth  
wear.

As we age we often slow down, our bones may become brittle and breaks take longer to mend. Older teeth also may become brittle and need extra care to keep them free from decay. They often have large fillings, may be worn down and may have root surfaces exposed.

## **Special problems of older teeth**

- **root decay as we get 'long in the tooth'**
- **old fillings breaking down**
- **dry mouth**
- **gastric reflux problems**
- **brushing problems due to loss of dexterity in our hands**

### **Fluoride**

- **rebuilds and toughens decayed or damaged teeth and roots**
- **protects healthy teeth**



Figure 2: Teeth showing  
exposed roots with  
active decay.



Figure 3:  
Teeth with root decay.

**EVERY TIME we eat or drink our teeth are under attack from ACID produced by PLAQUE BACTERIA.**

Tooth decay mainly happens when:

- too much sugar is eaten
- there is not enough fluoride in the mouth to help the teeth recover from plaque acid attack.

Fluoride treatment stabilises and hardens damaged areas of teeth and roots (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 4: Arthritis makes it difficult to hold a toothbrush



Decay Decay Decay