



Mouth showing tooth wear and early stages of root decay

Other problems of older teeth

- **Old fillings** may develop leaks around the edges, allowing cavities to recur. Some fillings may fall out, leaving a hole that may require urgent attention to prevent pain and serious problems.
- Wearing a **partial denture**. Dentures can act as a trap for food particles and plaque bacteria, causing bad breath, gum problems, and greater risk of decay in the adjacent teeth. Dentures should be cleaned after eating, and removed overnight.
- **Dry mouth** - It is not uncommon to have the feeling of dryness in the mouth. Sucking sweets or frequent sips of juice or sweetened drinks to make the mouth more comfortable can greatly increase the risk of decay. Sipping water frequently is a better way of coping with dry mouth.
- Chronic illnesses and an increasing need for medications. Some **medications** make the mouth feel dry, or taste unpleasant. It is highly desirable to use water to relieve the dryness or bad taste; sucking sweets should be avoided.

- **Gastric reflux problems** [a sour taste may indicate that juices from the stomach are being regurgitated into the mouth] --- gastric juices contain strong acids that can cause damage to tooth enamel and exposed root surfaces.
- Irregular toothbrushing → **not enough fluoride** to protect exposed root surfaces. A recent change in brushing habits/frequency, brought on by loss of dexterity in our hands eg onset of arthritis, may increase the risk of decay. A long-term habit of skipping brushing, particularly at bedtime may become a problem when we have some exposed root surfaces [which are particularly vulnerable to decay].

In all cases your dentist will discuss the various approaches with you, to help you settle on a plan to protect your teeth, and help damaged teeth to recover.

Your teeth will benefit most when:

- decay is detected early
- the underlying causes of the decay problem are identified and realistic goals are set
- a treatment plan, including home care, is agreed on and followed
- follow-up appointments are kept.

Further information

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