

# Geriatric Dentistry: Enhancing Oral Health and Quality of Life in the Aging Population

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## Description

As the global population continues to age, the field of dentistry has seen a significant shift towards geriatric care. Geriatric dentistry focuses on providing comprehensive oral health care to older adults, addressing the unique dental challenges and needs they face. This rapidly growing specialty aims to improve oral health, enhance quality of life, and promote overall well-being in the aging population. In this article, we will explore the importance of geriatric dentistry, the common oral health concerns among older adults, and the strategies employed to meet their specific dental needs. The world's population is experiencing a demographic shift, with a significant increase in the number of older adults. This aging population presents unique challenges in terms of healthcare, and oral health is no exception. The oral cavity undergoes various changes with age, such as tooth loss, gum recession, dry mouth, and an increased susceptibility to dental diseases. Geriatric dentistry plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges and improving the oral health outcomes for older adults. Many older adults have lost some or all of their natural teeth. Edentulism can lead to difficulties in chewing, speaking, and negatively impact an individual's self-esteem.

Geriatric dentistry focuses on providing suitable tooth replacement options, such as dentures, implants, or bridges, to restore oral function and improve aesthetics. Gum disease is prevalent in older adults, primarily due to factors like poor oral hygiene, systemic conditions, and medications. Geriatric dentistry emphasizes early diagnosis, non-surgical and surgical treatment approaches, and preventive strategies to manage and control periodontal disease. Many medications commonly prescribed to older adults can cause dry mouth, which increases the risk of dental decay and oral infections. Geriatric dentistry incorporates measures to alleviate the symptoms of dry mouth, such as saliva substitutes, medication adjustments, and lifestyle modifications. Older adults have a higher risk of developing oral cancer. Geriatric dentistry emphasizes regular oral cancer screenings, early detection, and appropriate treatment interventions to improve survival rates and reduce morbidity. Temporomandibular Joint Disorders (TMD) can cause significant pain and discomfort in the jaw joint and surrounding muscles. Geriatric dentistry focuses on diagnosing and managing TMD, providing pain relief, and improving jaw function through various treatment modalities.

## Comprehensive Oral Examinations

Geriatric patients require thorough dental evaluations to identify existing problems, assess risk factors, and develop appropriate treatment plans. This may involve a comprehensive review of medical history, oral cancer screenings, radiographic assessments, and evaluation of the prosthetic status. Geriatric dentistry emphasizes preventive measures to maintain oral health and prevent dental diseases. Regular dental cleanings, fluoride treatments, and education on oral hygiene techniques are crucial in preventing tooth decay and gum disease. Geriatric dental care often involves collaboration with other healthcare professionals, including primary care physicians, geriatricians, and pharmacists. This interdisciplinary approach ensures comprehensive care, considers the patient's overall health status, and addresses any potential interactions between medications and oral health.

## Restorative and Prosthetic Treatments

Geriatric dentistry offers a range of restorative and prosthetic options to address tooth loss and restore oral function. This may include dental implants, bridges, and removable dentures, customized to meet the unique needs of older patients.

## Special Considerations

Geriatric patients often have additional challenges, such as cognitive impairments, physical limitations, or dental anxiety. Geriatric dentistry incorporates techniques to accommodate these challenges, including gentle and compassionate care, sedation options, and modified treatment plans. Maintaining good oral health in older adults goes beyond treating dental conditions. It has a significant impact on overall quality of life, including nutrition, social interactions, and self-confidence. Geriatric dentistry aims to improve oral health outcomes, enabling older adults to enjoy a healthy diet, communicate effectively, and engage actively in social activities, ultimately enhancing their overall well-being. Geriatric dentistry is an evolving specialty that addresses the oral health challenges faced by the aging population. By understanding and catering to the unique needs of older adults, geriatric dentistry plays a vital role in promoting optimal oral health and improving quality of life. Through preventive care, comprehensive evaluations, and personalized treatment plans, geriatric dentists ensure that older adults receive the necessary dental care to maintain oral function, preserve natural teeth, and enhance overall well-being in their golden years.