

# Getting older in Melbourne? Expected oral changes

Survey results indicate that only 17% of those who participated have lost all their natural teeth. This questions the common myth that losing teeth is an inevitable part of getting old. The fact is that teeth can last a lifetime.

Ageing is not a disease despite the fact that we cannot avoid it. We can however, stop losing our teeth and prevent some oral diseases such as dental caries and gum disease, which lead to the loss of our natural teeth.

## Keeping our natural teeth into old age has several advantages.

Here are some:

- Good appearance.
- Improved speech.
- Chewing comfort.
- Fresh breath.
- Secure partial dentures.
- Enhanced enjoyment of food.
- Adequate nutrition, which helps to prevent many diseases.

Of course, like the rest of the body, the mouth changes with age. However, most of the changes attributed to ageing, actually occur due to oral disease, which may take years to develop. For example, having no teeth or teeth becoming loose is a sign of oral disease. Understanding changes in our mouth makes it easier to maintain a healthy mouth and teeth.

Dentures can improve oral function if you have no teeth or have lost part of your teeth.

It might appear that having dentures is more convenient. However, wearing dentures has many disadvantages.

Some examples mentioned by our survey participants are:

- Loose dentures. Particularly lower dentures.
- Difficulties when talking.
- Irritation to the gums.
- Loss of self-confidence when speaking.
- Decreased social enjoyment of food.
- Food caught under the dentures.
- Difficulties chewing, etc.

People's susceptibility to oral diseases varies due to the combination of several factors. The good news is that all oral diseases are preventable at any age. Those who are more susceptible need to give particular attention to these problems.

Whether caring for natural teeth or dentures, older adults face a range of special concerns which may affect their oral health status.

These include:

- Dry mouth.
- Tooth decay.
- Gum disease.
- Oral cancer.
- Break down of restorations.
- Lack of dexterity necessary to care for teeth or/and dentures.

These problems require special attention from you and may involve changes in your oral health care habits.

**Most oral diseases are preventable at any age.**

**The best time to keep your teeth and mouth healthy is NOW.**