GENERAL

Age happens. Tooth loss doesn’t have to.

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Many people assume that losing teeth is just something that happens as we age. Let's correct the misconception.

Myth: Tooth loss is inevitable with age.

Truth: Teeth aren?t meant to fall out at any age!

So, what?s causing older individuals to lose their teeth, and how can we prevent it?

Why is this misconception so prevalent?

1) Their early life experiences

A lot of people remember their grandparents wearing full dentures, often at a relatively early age. This leaves the impression that ?everyone loses their teeth over time?.

In reality, those older generations often had limited access to dental care, less knowledge about oral hygiene, and a lack of preventive resources like fluoride toothpastes.

2) Mistaking wear and tear for aging

People sometimes think enamel thinning or enamel erosion, changes of tooth color to yellow, or being sensitive are all phases of old age. Even though some changes occur with age, they don?t have to result in tooth loss. They are manageable with dental care.

3) Fear of the dentist

Older individuals who have had painful dental experiences in the past may avoid visiting a dentist, leading to worsening of oral problems. Consequently, when the tooth needs to be extracted, it instills the false belief that ?age is to blame?.

The real culprits of Tooth loss:

1) Gum disease (Periodontitis)

Gum disease is the chief cause of tooth loss in adults. It is often silent in its early stages and slowly progresses for years without realizing. Plaque buildup leads to inflamed gums which destroy the bone that holds teeth in its position. Pain occurs in its later stages. If gums bleed while brushing or feel tender, it?s a red flag not to ignore.

2) Tooth Decay (Cavities)

Cavities exist even after childhood. In fact, older adults are at higher risk, especially around old fillings that may have broken down and exposed tooth roots from receding gums. If its left untreated, decay can reach the nerve or root and eventually leads to tooth loss.

3) Teeth Grinding (Bruxism)

Clenching or grinding your teeth which often occurs during sleep or under stress, wears down enamel and stresses the bone and ligaments supporting the teeth. In the long run, this pressure can loosen teeth or cause fractures that results in extraction of the teeth.

4) Diabetes and Smoking

Both are major risk factors for gum diseases. Diabetes can weaken body?s defense mechanism against infections, including gum infections. Whereas smoking reduces blood flow to the gums, making the healing process harder. Either one or both significantly increase the risk of long-term tooth loss.

5) Skipping Dental visits

Neglecting the dental visits can turn a small issue into a major one. Routine checkups help suspect gum disease in its early stages, small cavities before they turn to serious damage, and any other oral health diseases you might not notice.

Preventive measures:

1. Brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste to remove plaque and prevent cavities.
2. Use floss or interdental brushes once daily to reduce gum disease and remove debris accumulated between tight spaces
3. Take a tooth-friendly diet. Avoid sugars like sticky snacks and sugary drinks. Choose fruits and veggies.
4. Visit the dentist every 6 months even though nothing hurts.
5. Don?t neglect or delay bleeding gums or loose teeth
6. Quit smoking.

Conclusion

You are never too old to have a healthy smile. Your teeth can last a lifetime with daily care and regular checkups.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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