

# Women's Oral Health: A Key to Overall Well-Being

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Hormonal changes throughout a woman's life, from puberty to menopause, significantly impact oral health, influencing conditions like gum disease and dry mouth
- › Poor oral health is linked to systemic conditions such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, highlighting the interconnectedness of oral and overall health
- › Menopause exacerbates oral health issues, leading to further health complications
- › Comprehensive oral health assessments are essential for preventing frailty and disability, emphasizing the need for regular dental check-ups with a biological dentist
- › Tailored oral health care for women is necessary at different life stages to address specific needs and prevent long-term health issues

Could your oral health be a key indicator of your overall well-being? According to a recent study published in *The Lancet Healthy Longevity*,<sup>1</sup> the state of your mouth is deeply connected to your general health and the aging process. Research shows that poor oral health is linked to serious conditions like Alzheimer's disease, diabetes and heart disease.<sup>2</sup>

Further, as women go through different life stages, hormonal changes dramatically impact oral tissues, increasing the risk of gum disease and dry mouth, especially during menopause.<sup>3</sup>

This is why maintaining good oral health isn't just about your teeth and gums. It affects your physical strength and mental well-being. You might not realize that taking care of your mouth even helps prevent frailty and disability as you age.<sup>4</sup>

Whether you're approaching menopause or already navigating its challenges, getting informed will help you make educated decisions about your oral care.

## **Women's Oral Health: A Key to Overall Well-Being**

Hormonal changes throughout a woman's life, from puberty to menopause, have profound effects on oral tissues. Menopause, in particular, presents unique challenges for oral health. During this stage, women experience hormonal fluctuations that exacerbate oral health problems.

The risk of gum disease and dry mouth increases, which leads to further complications if not addressed. Regular dental check-ups with a biological dentist and comprehensive oral health assessments will help in identifying and managing these issues early on.

Comprehensive oral health assessments are not just about checking for cavities or gum disease. They involve evaluating the overall condition of your mouth, including the number of remaining teeth, periodontal status and masticatory function, or chewing. These assessments help prevent frailty and disability by identifying issues before they become severe. Tailored oral health care is necessary at different life stages to address the unique needs of women.

Conventional methods of diagnosing oral health issues are generally effective, but they must be adapted to consider the hormonal changes women experience. Dentists should be aware of the impact of menopause and other life stages on oral health and provide tailored advice and treatment. This approach ensures that women receive the care they need to maintain their oral health and overall well-being.

## **Oral Health Shapes Overall Aging and Wellness**

Beyond bad breath or cavities, poor oral health is connected to serious conditions like cancer and heart diseases. This means taking care of your teeth and gums is essential for preventing these major health issues.<sup>5</sup>

The Lancet Healthy Longevity study also found that oral frailty, which includes having fewer teeth or difficulty chewing, is linked to physical frailty and other health problems. When your mouth isn't in good shape, it leads to difficulties in eating and absorbing nutrients, making your body weaker over time. This physical decline increases the risk of falls and disability, and may even reduce your lifespan.

But how does poor oral health lead to these problems? The research suggests that imbalances in the bacteria in your mouth trigger chronic inflammation throughout your body. This persistent inflammation weakens your immune system, making it harder to fight off diseases. Additionally, nutritional deficiencies from not being able to eat properly further compromise your health.<sup>6</sup>

Early intervention helps prevent or delay the onset of frailty and other related health problems, ensuring a better quality of life as you age.<sup>7</sup>

## **Tailoring Oral Health Care for Women's Unique Needs**

Professor Lior Shapira, scientific chair of EuroPerio11, the [European Federation of Periodontology's \(EFP\)](#) congress in periodontology and implant dentistry, points out that women's health includes specific factors often missed in general oral health discussions.<sup>8</sup> Shifts in hormones like estrogen and progesterone make gums more vulnerable to disease and worsen existing oral conditions.

Dr. Purnima Kumar, a EuroPerio11 moderator, explains that many dental professionals aren't trained to identify and treat the effects of these hormonal changes on oral health. This lack of specialized knowledge means that women's unique oral health needs are frequently not met adequately.

As noted in an EFP news release, life stages such as pregnancy and menopause require customized dental care tailored to each phase of a woman's life. Despite the clear

connections, there is still a significant lack of awareness and research focused on women's oral health.

To bridge this gap, the EuroPerio11 scientific committee stresses the importance of recognizing and addressing these gender-specific oral health factors. They advocate for dental care approaches that are personalized to support women's oral health effectively at every stage of their lives.<sup>9</sup>

During the menopausal transition, hormonal fluctuations lead to increased risks of jawbone loss and gum disease.<sup>10</sup> These hormonal changes reduce the production of saliva, causing dry mouth, which in turn makes it easier for bacteria to thrive and gums to become inflamed.

Yet, many women are unaware of how menopause affects their oral health. According to Delta Dental of California and Affiliates' 2024 Oral Health and Menopause Survey, over one-third of women aged 40 and older have noticed a decline in their oral health as they age, not realizing that these changes could be linked to menopause.<sup>11</sup> This lack of awareness means that many women do not seek the necessary dental care to address these issues promptly.

However, many women want personalized advice on taking care of their oral health during menopause. They're looking for specific instructions on what steps to take to keep their mouths healthy as they age.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, there is a need for more training opportunities for dental professionals. Better education for dentists will improve the care they provide to menopausal women, ensuring that these women receive the support they need to maintain good oral health.

## **Oral Discomfort Is Prevalent in Menopausal Women**

Another study found that many menopausal women suffer from significant oral discomfort. Common symptoms include dry mouth and a burning sensation in the mouth, which can make eating, speaking and overall daily activities challenging.<sup>13</sup>

These uncomfortable sensations stem from hormonal changes that occur during menopause. Although hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is commonly used to manage menopausal symptoms, it may not fully alleviate oral discomfort for every woman.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, oral discomfort leads to increased anxiety and stress. This heightened anxiety, in turn, reduces salivary secretion even more, creating a cycle of worsening dry mouth and discomfort.<sup>15</sup>

## **Practical Steps to Enhance Your Oral Health**

By adopting specific habits and practices, you may significantly reduce the risk of serious health issues linked to poor oral hygiene. Here are some actionable steps you can take to ensure your oral health contributes positively to your general health.

- 1. Establish a consistent oral hygiene routine** – Brush your teeth at least twice a day using a fluoride-free toothpaste to protect against cavities. Make sure to brush for two minutes each time, covering all surfaces of your teeth and gently along your gumline. Don't forget to brush your tongue daily to eliminate bacteria that causes bad breath and other oral health issues.
- 2. Incorporate regular dental check-ups** – Schedule dental appointments every six months for professional cleanings and comprehensive examinations. Regular visits with a biological dentist help identify and address problems early, such as gum disease or infections, before they escalate into more serious health concerns. These check-ups are important for maintaining both your oral and overall health.
- 3. Adopt a diet low in refined sugar and processed foods** – Limit your intake of sugar-laden snacks and beverages, as sugar feeds harmful bacteria in your mouth that cause tooth decay and gum disease. Opt for whole foods rich in nutrients that support oral health, such as fruits and vegetables. Incorporating plenty of water into your daily diet also helps wash away food particles and bacteria.

**4. Choose mouth-healthy supplements and nutrients** – Consider taking supplements that promote oral health. Used as a mouthwash, for instance, methylene blue, in a 0.5% to 1% concentration, has been shown to deactivate harmful microorganisms that lead to periodontitis.<sup>16</sup> Xylitol, a natural sugar alcohol, has been shown to reduce and even reverse early dental caries.

You can easily find xylitol toothpastes, mouthwashes, oral tablets and chewing gum. Just make sure the products you buy do not contain fluoride or triclosan, as both are toxic. Also keep xylitol-containing products away from pets. It's extremely toxic to dogs in particular.

Additionally, incorporating **collagen-rich foods**, such as slow-cooked meats and bone broth, helps maintain the strength and integrity of your gums and teeth.

For extra care, try **oil pulling using coconut oil**. Coconut oil is antibacterial and antiviral, and oil pulling has been found to reduce gingivitis and plaque, significantly lowering plaque index scores compared to a control group, while also reducing bacterial colony counts in saliva.<sup>17</sup>

Notably, researchers also found that coconut oil pulling worked as well as chemical (chlorhexidine) mouthwash for plaque score, gingival index score and bleeding-on-probing.<sup>18</sup>

To try it, take a small amount of the oil and swish it around your mouth, "pulling" it between your teeth and ensuring it moves around your entire mouth. After about 20 minutes, spit the oil out into the garbage. You can use oil pulling daily along with regular brushing and flossing.

By following these steps, you're taking proactive measures to protect your oral health, which in turn supports your overall well-being. Taking care of your mouth today will lead to a healthier, more vibrant life tomorrow.

## **Opt for Biological Dentistry**

Biological dentists have undergone training that equips them to view and treat your oral health as an integral part of your overall health. They're also trained in how to safely remove mercury fillings. Ideally, find a biological dentist to care for all your dental needs, as they're far less likely to perform procedures that will cause problems later on. You can find a mercury-free dentist using the resources below:

[Consumers for Dental Choice](#)

[Dental Amalgam Mercury Solutions](#)

[\(DAMS\)](#). Email them [here](#) or call 651-644-4572 for an information packet

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[Holistic Dental Association](#)

[Huggins Applied Healing](#)

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[International Academy of Biological Dentistry and Medicine \(IABDM\)](#)

[International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology \(IAOMT\)](#)

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[International Association of Mercury Safe Dentists](#)

[Talk International](#)

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## Sources and References

- <sup>1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7</sup> [The Lancet Healthy Longevity](#) October 17, 2024
- <sup>3, 8, 9</sup> [News Medical Life Sciences](#) October 23, 2024, [European Federation of Periodontology \(EFP\)](#)
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- <sup>12</sup> [Delta Dental](#), Menopause and Its Effects on Oral Health
- <sup>13, 14, 15</sup> [Maturitas](#) May 20, 2009, Volume 63, Issue 1, Pages 56-62
- <sup>16</sup> [Br J Oral Maxillofac Surg](#) January 2021; 59(1): 135-136
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