



Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

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The Healthy Journey

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The importance of dental hygiene

By Allison Udriș M.S. LCPC

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 62.7% of adults over the age of 65 visited the dentist in the year 2015. Dental health is very important as adults grow older. Risk for developing conditions such as gum disease and oral cancer increase during adulthood. Gum disease is the main cause of tooth loss in adults.

Health conditions can affect your teeth, and your teeth can affect your health.

The relationship between dental health and physical health

Medication. People tend to take more medications as they grow older. Many medications that adults are prescribed such as antidepressants, blood pressure medications, antihistamines, muscle relaxers, and pain medications, can cause dry mouth as a side effect. Although dry mouth seems harmless, dry mouth can lead to cavities. Saliva protects teeth, so when there is less saliva in your mouth, your teeth are more likely to get cavities.

Diabetes. People who have diabetes are more likely to develop dental problems, such as gum disease. When people have diabetes, they are more likely to experience dry mouth, can cause cavities, soreness, and break down tooth enamel. Everyone has plaque, a sticky type of bacteria, on their teeth (especially after eating). Diabetics have high glucose (sugar) levels in their saliva, which creates an environment that helps bacteria and plaque grow more than the average person. If a person does not brush their teeth regularly to remove this plaque, it releases acids that can break down tooth enamel and cause cavities or tooth decay.

Wear and tear. People can get cavities at any age. However, many people do not know that dental fillings have a life expectancy of about 8-10 years. Fillings can break down over time and no longer protect your teeth. For example, food and bacteria can enter beneath the filling. This can cause pain, nerve damage, and in some cases, nerve damage resulting in the need for a root canal. Regular dental visits can help you maintain your fillings and avoid cavities.

Cardiovascular disease. Your oral health can affect your heart. Bacteria can spread from your mouth to



other parts of your body through the bloodstream. These bacteria can reach the heart and cause inflammation, leading to several conditions such as clogged arteries (atherosclerosis), stroke, and infections in the inner lining of the heart (endocarditis).

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Headaches and migraines. Many people experience painful migraines without knowing the cause. Interestingly, people who grind their teeth when they sleep may have bite irregularities that lead to TMJ (temporomandibular joint) problems in their jaw. Muscles in the jaw tighten when people grind their teeth, and this pain can affect other areas of the skull, causing headaches and migraines. Many people who experience TMJ also experience jaw pain or locking. Dentists can help patients find ways to help, such as suggesting dental implants or making you a night guard to help prevent grinding.

What are examples of healthy dental habits?

Brush and floss. It is recommended that adults brush their teeth twice daily to remove plaque. It is also recommended that toothbrushes be replaced every 3 to 4 months because they can collect bacteria. Flossing once a day can help remove plaque that is too hard to reach with a toothbrush. These habits help reduce cavities and other dental problems.

Clean dentures. It is recommended that adults clean their dentures on a daily basis. Toothpaste and household cleaners should not be used on dentures because they are too abrasive, meaning they can erode and break down your dentures. Cleaners such as Polident and Efferdent are made specifically for dentures and can be purchased at drug and grocery stores.

Everyone should get a dental exam even if they don't have any teeth.

Stop smoking. Both cigarettes and chewing tobacco are harmful to your teeth and gums. Smoking contributes to tooth stains, diminished sense of taste and smell, gum disease, and tooth decay. Smoking is the main cause of oral cancer. Smokers tend to heal slower after dental procedures or surgeries than non-smokers. Talk to your doctor or to HANDLS staff member on options to help you quit smoking.

Visit a dentist. It is recommended that people get dental cleanings every 6 months. This is true even if you have missing teeth or no teeth at all. This is because dentists can perform an exam to look for signs of oral cancer and gum disease. Additionally, dentists can check to make sure your dentures fit properly and are professionally

cleaned. Make sure your dentist is aware of any health conditions you may have, especially diabetes or cardiovascular disease. Also, make sure your dentist knows what medications you are taking. It may be helpful to take a list of your medications to your dental appointment.



What if I don't have dental insurance?

Many types of private insurance (through a spouse or employer) offer options for dental insurance. You can enroll in dental benefits during "Open Enrollment" through your employer. However, if you are covered by Medicare or Medicaid, you may not currently be guaranteed dental benefits. Medicaid does not currently cover dental services for adults over the age of 21. There are some exceptions; Medicaid covers dental coverage for pregnant women and adults enrolled in Rare and Expensive Case Management (REM).

Recent legislation was passed by the Maryland General Assembly in April 2018 that requires the Maryland Department of health to start a pilot program for adult dental coverage in 2019, with a focus on adults who qualify for Medicaid and Medicare. You should expect to hear more in the news about this pilot in 2019.

In the meantime, you can obtain dental insurance coverage from Maryland Health Connection. You can enroll online at www.marylandhealthconnection.gov if you have access to the internet, or you can call toll-free at 1-855-642-8572 for assistance. Through the Maryland Health Connection, you can compare dental plans based on your needs and search for dentists in your area who accept the insurance that you chose. You can also choose a family dental plan through Maryland Health Connection.

Resources

[Dental Care For Adults: A Lesson In Prevention](https://www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/life-stages/adult-oral-care/dental-care-for-adults-a-lesson-in-prevention-0214) (https://www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/life-stages/adult-oral-care/dental-care-for-adults-a-lesson-in-prevention-0214)

[Healthy Habit: Brush and Floss Daily](https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/adults-over-60/healthy-habits) (https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/adults-over-60/healthy-habits)

[Diabetes and Your Smile](https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/d/diabetes) (https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/d/diabetes)

[How Oral Health And Heart Disease Are Connected](https://www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/conditions/heart-disease/how-oral-health-and-heart-disease-are-connected-0115) (https://www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/conditions/heart-disease/how-oral-health-and-heart-disease-are-connected-0115)

[Medicaid adult dental coverage pilot program](https://www.ada.org/en/publications/ada-news/2018-archive/may/maryland-bill-authorizes-medicaid-adult-dental-coverage-pilot-program) (https://www.ada.org/en/publications/ada-news/2018-archive/may/maryland-bill-authorizes-medicaid-adult-dental-coverage-pilot-program)

[Dental plans](https://www.marylandhealthconnection.gov/shop-and-compare/dental-plans/) (https://www.marylandhealthconnection.gov/shop-and-compare/dental-plans/)

Finding dental health services

www.FreeDentalCare.US/ is a webpage that identifies free or reduced cost dental care clinics in your area. Below is a list of some dental clinics in Baltimore. You may also find assistance by asking your primary care provider for a referral who may be familiar with resources in your neighborhood.

Park West at Belvedere

410-542-7800
3319 W. Belvedere Avenue Baltimore, MD 21215

Total Health Care

Division Health Center

410-383-8300
1501 Division Street. Baltimore, MD 21217

Dental Clinic at Healthcare for the Homeless

410-837-5533
725 Fallsway Road Baltimore, MD 21202

Chase Brexton Health Care

Pediatric dental services only

410-837-2050
1111 N. Charles Street Baltimore, MD 21201

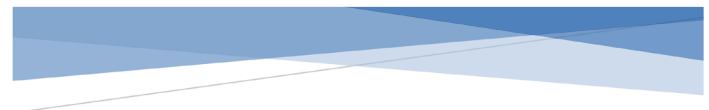
Referral guide

By Jennifer H Norbeck LCSW/C, CCRC

Updated medical resource guide

HANDLS has updated our medical resource guide called the *Medical Resource and Referral Guide for Primary Care, Mental Health and Social Services: A Directory of Health Resources Serving the Greater Baltimore Area*. This is the resource and referral guide that we send with your participant report packet. The purpose of this referral guide is to offer a list of health care providers and health care facilities that provide the outpatient medical services you may need for medical follow-up care outside of your participation in the HANDLS study. It describes non-profit and governmental resources available to provide services to individuals with health insurance, medical assistance, lower income, or uninsured residents of the Baltimore area. The guide is not intended to list all available programs, but rather major programs that provide primary health care, pharmacy assistance, hotlines, HIV screening, literacy program, GED programs, mental health and substance abuse treatment programs. Some of the programs listed will accept Medicare, medical assistance or private insurance.

Look for the updated resource guide in your next report packet or you can find it here if you have access to the internet: <https://handls.nih.gov/ReferralGuide.pdf>



*Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods
of Diversity across the Life Span*

HANDLS REFERRAL GUIDE

*For Primary Care, Mental Health and Social Services
A Directory of Health Resources Serving Greater Baltimore Area*

**The National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Aging, and the Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span Study do recommend any particular facility, physician or service.

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The Quarterly Newsletter for the HANDLS Community

The purpose of this study is to learn about changes in health over time. Using our medical research vehicles, we want to study as many people with different backgrounds as we can. We want this study to help us understand healthy aging by examining the effects of different backgrounds on changes in health over time. The information that we gather will help improve health and prevent disabilities. We want to do this for people from all backgrounds, particularly those in poor and minority communities.

For information about our study call 1-877-677-9538
or visit our website hands.nih.gov

