Most people have been planning for retirement for decades, tucking money away in retirement accounts and scheduling vacations. What many people forget to plan for, however, are dental benefits. Most retirees lose employer-sponsored dental coverage when they leave the workforce. And although the Medicare federal health insurance program is available for people who are over the age of 65, it doesn’t cover dental care.1

Unfortunately, when retirees have to pay for dental services out of their own pockets, they sometimes decide to forego dental visits entirely: In fact, nearly 40 percent of seniors did not see a dentist in 2014.2 The decrease in frequency of dental visits can be harmful to older adults’ oral health because they often contend with dental issues related to aging, medications and other systemic health conditions such as diabetes and heart disease.3

But retirees do have options other than paying out-of-pocket. Delta Dental of Arizona offers low-cost individual dental plans designed to meet the unique oral health needs of people of all ages. Visit deltadentalcoversme.com to learn more about our individual dental plan options.
As we age, many of us find ourselves with health conditions that require medication - and while medications can improve overall health, some may have adverse side effects on oral health.4

One of the most common side effects of many medications is dry mouth, which does more than just make you crave a cold glass of water. Food particles and bacteria cling to teeth longer when there’s not enough saliva to rinse them away, which can eventually result in tooth decay.

Other medications can cause canker sores, a metallic taste in the mouth, discolored teeth, or “gingival overgrowth,” which is when gums become swollen and begin to grow over teeth. Be sure to let your dentist know when you start taking new medications, vitamins or supplements. You should also ask your physician about possible side effects, then monitor your oral health for unexpected changes.

In fact, it’s always a good idea to keep a close eye on your oral health while you’re taking any kind of medication, regardless of your age. If you notice any irregularities, let your physician and your dentist know immediately.
Oral Health and Preventive Measures for Alzheimer’s Patients

When an Alzheimer’s patient starts to exhibit symptoms of the disease, tasks that were once second nature can suddenly become challenging. Even daily routines, such as brushing and flossing, can be hard to remember – which is why gum disease and tooth decay are common in Alzheimer’s patients.

To help a friend or family member with Alzheimer’s or dementia maintain their oral health, here are a few tips for you, other family members and nurses to consider:

• Write short, step-by-step instructions for brushing and flossing that your loved one can reference, then post them in the bathroom, preferably near the sink. Make sure the instructions go through the whole process: Start with locating the toothbrush in the bathroom, picking it up and applying a pea-sized amount of toothpaste, brush for two minutes and finish with spitting, rinsing teeth with water and storing the toothbrush.

• Invest in a toothbrush and floss that make oral health care easier. Most electric toothbrushes have a timer so your loved one will know how long to brush. For those with limited dexterity, electric toothbrushes and floss holders may be easier to manage than the standard varieties.

• Physically demonstrate how to brush and floss teeth. You can have your friend or family member watch as you practice on yourself, or help guide their hand as they brush and floss.

• Keep track of your loved one’s oral health care. Be aware of any oral discomfort or pain, especially during mealtime and while brushing or flossing teeth.

• Make sure to schedule regular dentist visits. If a full-time care facility becomes necessary, be sure to ask the facility how they handle dental care.

• Alzheimer’s and dementia medications, such as antidepressants and antipsychotics, often cause dry mouth, which can lead to plaque build-up and eventually gum disease. Make sure your loved one has access to water and leave them reminders to take sips throughout the day. If you have nursing care, it may also be helpful to remind staff that plenty of water is essential.

If you notice a change in your loved one’s oral health, be sure to let their care team know so they can help determine the cause and get the issue treated quickly.
MOUTH-HEALTHY RECIPE: WATERGATE SALAD

Ingredients:
- 1-ounce package sugar-free, fat-free pistachio instant pudding
- 8-ounce can crushed pineapple, undrained
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- 2 cups thawed sugar-free whipped cream
- Chopped walnuts

Directions:
Combine dry pudding mix, pineapple and yogurt in a large bowl and whisk until blended. Stir in the whipped cream. Refrigerate for 1 hour. Serve with a sprinkle of chopped walnuts.

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