

# BE A SMART MOUTH

As people age there are subtle changes in the mouth that occur. Some of the changes include:

- dry mouth possibly due to increased use of medications
- increased risk of gum disease
- risk of oral cancer problems with cavities or decay due to inadequate brushing and flossing

Equally important to general health for seniors is good oral care of teeth and gums. Colorado ranks in the top three states with the greatest percentage of seniors retaining their natural teeth at 60.5 percent. However, 18 percent of Coloradans over age 65 have lost all their natural teeth. Having missing teeth can cause problems speaking and eating and can influence a persons choices in food quality and quantity.

While Americans paid out-of-pocket for approximately one-half of all dental care expenses in 2000, people age 65 and older paid more than 75 percent of their dental expenses. Medicare, the primary source of medical coverage for seniors, does not include dental benefits, and Colorado Medicaid covers only those dental procedures that are directly related to a concurrent medical condition. For low-income seniors taking care of their oral health may be so cost prohibitive that it results in decreased quality of life as they choose not address their oral health needs.

*This oral health tip comes from Oral Health Awareness Colorado!, a coalition of federal, state and community organizations that developed the state's first formal oral health plan aimed at improving the general health of Colorado residents.*