

Baby Boomers Facing Oral Health Test

Generation Can Easily Challenge Common Gum Disease

As the first baby boomers march into their 60s, oral health professionals are sounding a rallying cry for that generation to increase its awareness of the dangers of periodontal or gum disease.

“Although the oral health of the nation is improving and more people are keeping their teeth throughout their lifetimes, gum disease is still a problem. It’s important for baby boomers to pay increased attention to their oral health just as they are other areas of their well-being,” said Thomas Quinn, DMD, MHP, Dental Director for Northeast Delta Dental.

Gum disease typically develops when plaque, the naturally-occurring, bacteria-harboring mucus on teeth is allowed to build up along and under the mouth’s gum line until it hardens into tartar. Symptoms of gum disease include bad breath; red, swollen, tender, or bleeding gums; painful chewing; and sensitive teeth. At advanced stages, gum disease can lead to a loosening, then loss, of teeth.

According to the National Institutes of Health, people usually don’t show signs of gum disease until they are in their 30s or 40s. While it’s not merely age that encourages the onset of gum



disease, the accumulated effects of lifestyle and genetic factors such as smoking, hormonal changes, diabetes, stress, medications, and illnesses can all have negative impacts on the health of gums. An estimated 80 percent of American adults currently have some form of gum disease.

How can this generation lower the boom on gum disease and help avoid its unpleasant effects?

Oral health experts say the time-tested strategy of brushing with fluoride toothpaste twice a day and flossing every day is a great start. Visiting the dentist routinely for a checkup and professional cleaning is also critical in watching gum disease. Tweaking personal habits such as eating a well-balanced diet and avoiding the use of tobacco products also contributes.

“With a mix of self-awareness, daily care at home, and regular trips to the dentist, people can help keep their teeth and gums looking and feeling healthy for a lifetime,” Dr. Quinn said.

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