

Menopause and a Healthy Mouth – Part 1

For a woman starting menopause, there are so many things going through her mind, such as how will this impact my everyday life, what changes do I need to make in order to stay healthy.

Nine out of 10, the last thing she's thinking about is how menopause will impact the health of my mouth. Believe it or not, she should be thinking just that as menopause can sometimes have a negative impact on oral health.

It's Hormonal

At its most basic, menopause marks the moment in a woman's life where her menstrual cycle ends and she is not longer fertile. This normally happens between the ages of 47 to 55, and is all driven by hormonal changes in her body as the amount of estrogen a woman's body is making begins to decrease.

These hormonal changes can cause quite a few things to happen. For starters, a lower level of estrogen in a woman's body can lead to bone loss, which can then result in tooth problems. As bone density lowers in the body, teeth can become weaker and more likely to break or fall out.

In fact, some studies have shown the lowering of estrogen during menopause can result in a greater likelihood of tooth loss.

Hormonal changes can also cause changes such as a dry mouth. And as we know, a dry mouth can sometimes cause tooth decay or even gum disease as saliva is important when it comes to protecting the teeth and gums from the acids made by plaque.

Changes in hormone levels can even cause a woman's ability to taste foods to change, or cause them to be more sensitive to cold and hot foods. And even some medications a woman may be placed on by her primary care physician to help battle some of the negative affects menopause can have on the body can cause changes in mouth health.

What Can Happen

Because of the all the hormonal changes, plus the added stress, of going through menopause, all of this can have a potentially dramatic impact on the health of your mouth.

For example, women with menopause can sometimes find themselves with:

- Gingivitis
- Periodontal disease
- Dry mouth
- Changes in how food tastes

According to an article in the *New York Times*

(<http://health.nytimes.com/health/guides/disease/periodontitis/risk-factors.html>), a 2005 study found that bone loss in the alveolar bone (which holds the tooth in place) was a major predictor of tooth loss in postmenopausal women, and periodontal disease is the main cause of alveolar bone loss.

Additionally, during menopause some women can develop a rare condition called menopausal gingivostomatitis, where the gums are dry, shiny, and bleed easily.

In part 2 Dr.; Hirschberg will discuss what can be done to help.