

Science News

from research organizations

'Giant' problem looms for aging population

Date: May 14, 2018

Source: University of Otago

Summary: Urgent attention needs to be paid to frail older New Zealanders' oral health, a study has highlighted.

Share:      

FULL STORY

Urgent attention needs to be paid to frail older New Zealanders' oral health, a University of Otago study has highlighted.

In a world first, Otago researchers surveyed the oral health of 987 people living in aged residential care and found those with dementia, and older men in general, have dirtier and more decayed teeth.

Otago Head of Department of Oral Sciences and lead author, Professor Murray Thomson, describes poor oral health as one of the "geriatric giants" with the situation a "major clinical and public health problem which is going to get worse."

Older people have higher rates of cognitive and physical impairments that can adversely affect their oral self-care and complicate the provision of oral care, he says.

"Neither the aged care sector nor the dental profession, in most countries, is prepared. Not only do we have more and more older people every year, but more and more people are entering old age with their own teeth, rather than full dentures, as was the situation just a couple of decades ago.

"In some ways, dentistry has been a victim of its success -- we have long emphasised the idea of 'teeth for life' without much thought to what happens towards the end of life.

"We also now know that half of those in old age will end up in residential aged care, and that more and more of those will have some form of dementia."

Professor Thomson believed that "slow progress" was being made in the area.

"It's a very complex situation involving a lot of players -- the aged care sector, the Ministry of Health, the dental profession, and the public. An encouraging sign is the inclusion of oral health in New Zealand's Healthy Ageing Strategy. That's a starting point, but there is a lot of work to be done," he says.

Of those examined in the study (representative of the more than 14,000 New Zealanders living in aged care), recently published in the journal *Gerodontology*, about half had severely impaired cognitive function, and more than a third required fillings or extractions.

Those with severely impaired cognitive function had greater numbers of teeth with decay. They also had higher oral debris scores, reflecting poorer daily oral hygiene care.

Professor Thomson says greater rates of tooth decay can result in dental and facial infections, poorer quality of life, malnutrition and difficulties in communication.

The researchers also found that even the most cognitively impaired participants were able to be examined fairly easily, meaning that regular, routine removal of oral debris by carers should not be difficult.

"The issue that we currently face is that much of that debris removal is not being done, and this, along with frequent exposure to sugary, over-processed meals and snacks, and poor salivary function, is enabling plaque and dental caries to flourish in aged residential care populations."

For those wanting to improve or maintain their oral health, Professor Thomson has some simple advice: brush twice daily with fluoride toothpaste; clean carefully between the teeth at least two to three times per week; avoid having sweet drinks or snacks between meals (and that includes sugar in tea or coffee -- it takes only a couple of days to get used to not having it); and avoid smoking.

"For people who have poor oral health in middle age, it is not going to be any better in old age, and an honest, open conversation with a dentist about the options, which may include complete extraction, may be a very good idea."

Story Source:

Materials provided by **University of Otago**. *Note: Content may be edited for style and length.*

Journal Reference:

1. William M. Thomson, Moira B. Smith, Catherine Anna Ferguson, Ngaire M. Kerse, Kathryn Peri, Barry Gribben. **Oral status, cognitive function and dependency among New Zealand nursing home residents**. *Gerodontology*, 2018; DOI: 10.1111/ger.12337

Cite This Page:

MLA	APA	Chicago
-----	-----	---------

University of Otago. "'Giant' problem looms for aging population." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 14 May 2018. <www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/05/180514122550.htm>.

RELATED STORIES

Poor Oral Health May Put Older Individuals at Increased Risk of Frailty

Dec. 20, 2017 — The presence of oral health problems was linked with greater risks of being frail and developing frailty in older age in a recent ... **read more »**

Insult to Injury: US Workers Without Paid Sick Leave Suffer from Mental Distress

Sep. 15, 2017 — Only seven states in the US have mandatory paid sick leave laws, yet, 15 states have passed preemptive legislation prohibiting localities from passing sick leave. Paid sick leave is gaining momentum ... **read more »**

Sedentary Behavior Increases Risk of Death for Frail, Inactive Adults

Aug. 21, 2017 — Sedentary time, for example, time spent sitting, increases the risk of death for middle-aged and older people who are frail and inactive, but does not appear to increase the risk for non-frail people ... **read more »**

Screening Tool May Under-Report Malnutrition Risk in Hospitalized Frail Older People

June 20, 2014 — A number of frail, older hospital patients in the UK who are either malnourished or at risk of malnutrition may currently go unreported, according to the findings of a new clinical study. The ... [read more »](#)

FROM AROUND THE WEB

Below are relevant articles that may interest you. ScienceDaily shares links and proceeds with scholarly publications in the TrendMD network.

Medtech stories we missed this week: July 28, 2017

Danielle Kirsh, Drug Delivery Business

Pertinax Pharma tackles wound care, dental health and more with its controlled-release antiseptic

Sarah Faulkner, Drug Delivery Business

Prolonging the lives & independence of Alzheimer's patients with artificial intelligence

Sarah Faulkner, Drug Delivery Business

Medtronic, Nutrino update iPro2 myLog app for CGM

Brad Perriello, Drug Delivery Business

International Team Developing Reagent Test That Could Broaden Access to TB Screening

360Dx

BioAffinity Initiates Clinical Validation for Early Lung Cancer Test

360Dx

Study: Growing concern over narcotic painkillers and their addiction risk

Sarah Faulkner, Drug Delivery Business

NIH launches pivotal trials for artificial pancreas

Sarah Faulkner, Drug Delivery Business

Powered by **TREND MD**

Free Subscriptions

Get the latest science news with ScienceDaily's free email newsletters, updated daily and weekly. Or view hourly updated newsfeeds in your RSS reader:

 Email Newsletters

 RSS Feeds

Follow Us

Keep up to date with the latest news from ScienceDaily via social networks:

 Facebook

 Twitter

[g+ Google+](#)[in LinkedIn](#)

Have Feedback?

Tell us what you think of ScienceDaily -- we welcome both positive and negative comments. Have any problems using the site? Questions?

[!\[\]\(c694a3ff3b077d76910920a6a1593ab4_img.jpg\) Leave Feedback](#)[!\[\]\(ec9132f1d27c8919987d92907322654d_img.jpg\) Contact Us](#)

[About This Site](#) | [Editorial Staff](#) | [Awards & Reviews](#) | [Contribute](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#)

Copyright 2018 ScienceDaily or by other parties, where indicated. All rights controlled by their respective owners.

Content on this website is for information only. It is not intended to provide medical or other professional advice.

Views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of ScienceDaily, its staff, its contributors, or its partners.

Financial support for ScienceDaily comes from advertisements and referral programs, where indicated.