

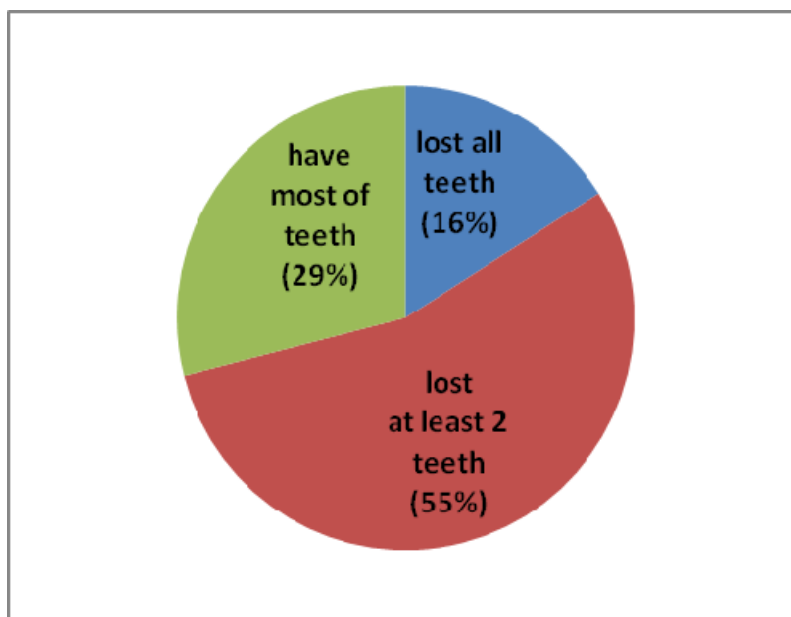
Oral Health and Dental Care Service Use among Adults Aged 50 and Over in the United States

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This fact sheet describes the oral health and dental care service use of middle-aged and older adults in the United States, aged 50 and over. Data from the 2008 version of the Health and Retirement Study were employed to investigate these issues.

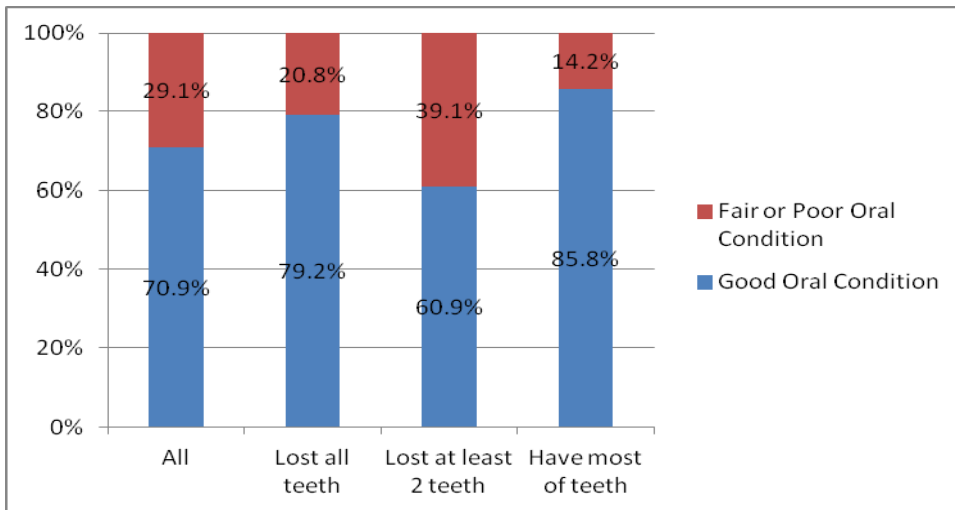
Oral health is associated with many other health conditions (cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cognition) and overall quality of life. Maintaining good oral health is related to access to and use of dental care services. Older adults' oral health conditions have improved in recent decades. However, among middle-aged and older adults, about 16% report that they have lost all of their teeth, and 55% report having lost at least two teeth (see Figure 1). Only 29% of this population still has most of their teeth.

Figure 1. Older Adults with and without Teeth



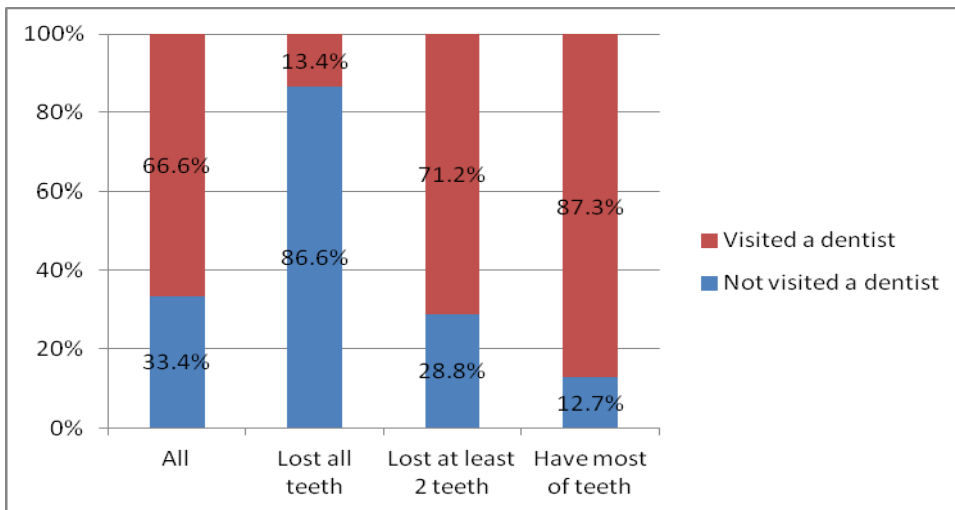
Older adults' perceptions of their own mouth and teeth conditions are critical factors related to good oral health. Approximately 30% of older adults report that the condition of their mouths and teeth is fair or poor (see Figure 2). Further, 20% of older adults who have lost all of their teeth perceive the condition of their mouths as fair or poor, while about 40% of those who lost more than two teeth say the condition of their mouths and teeth is fair or poor. Finally, 14.2% of those who still have most of their teeth consider their mouths and teeth to be in fair or poor condition.

Figure 2. Mouth and Teeth Condition among Older Adults with and without Teeth



Regular dental visits are an effective and efficient way to improve and maintain oral health conditions. Among middle-aged and older adults, only 66.6% visited a dentist between 2006 and 2008 (see Figure 3). During this same time period, among older adults who lost all of their teeth, only 13.4% visited a dentist. This is compared to 71.2% of those who lost some teeth and 87.3% of those who have most of their teeth.

Figure 3. Dental Visit by Number of Teeth



Dental health care is expensive. Unfortunately, most persons age 65 and older do not have dental insurance. If they have insurance, it often does not cover all dental expenses. Therefore, older adults must pay for part or all of their dental care out of their own pockets. Finding the resources to cover more of the dental care costs through current programs like Medicare and Medicaid is important to the well being of these groups.