

Eating problems are common among older home care clients

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Eating problems are common among older home care clients, a new study from the University of Eastern Finland shows. Nearly 30% of the 250 older care clients studied reported poor appetite, 20% had problems

with chewing, 14% had problems with swallowing, and nearly 20% reported eating problems related to teeth or dentures.

The study constitutes part of the Nutrition, Oral Health and Medication (NutOrMed) study at the University of Eastern Finland, and the findings were reported in *Clinical and Experimental Dental Research*.

The study sample included 250 home care clients aged 75 and older, living in the eastern part of Finland. The participants were interviewed in their home by their own home care nurse as well as by a clinical nutritionist, a pharmacist, and a dental hygienist. The study examined the prevalence and determinants of eating problems when screened by a clinical nutritionist and a dental hygienist.

Eating problems are associated with decreased food intake and poorer nutritional status

Eating problems were divided into loss of [appetite](#), problems with chewing, problems with swallowing, and oral health-related eating problems. The researchers found that all reported eating problems were associated with the participants' poorer nutritional status and decreased [food intake](#) during the past 3 months.

They also found that participants who estimated their oral health to be poor were more likely to report problems with chewing and swallowing. Edentulousness, on the other hand, increased the likelihood of problems with chewing and oral health problems. A high number of drugs in regular use was associated with loss of appetite and oral health-related eating problems. Edentulous participants and those who had toothache or problems with dentures were more likely to report eating problems when interviewed by a [dental hygienist](#). The feeling of dry mouth increased the likelihood of eating problems.

"It is important for [older people](#) to maintain good [oral health](#) because it affects eating," says Dentist Annina Salmi, the first author of the article.

"In this study, loss of appetite was the most common finding, suggesting that eating problems are multifaceted. Another thing we observed was that clients talk about their eating-related problems differently with different [health](#) care professionals, which is why eating problems should be screened continuously and in different ways, in interprofessional collaboration."

More information: Annina Salmi et al, Eating problems among old home care clients, *Clinical and Experimental Dental Research* (2022).
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