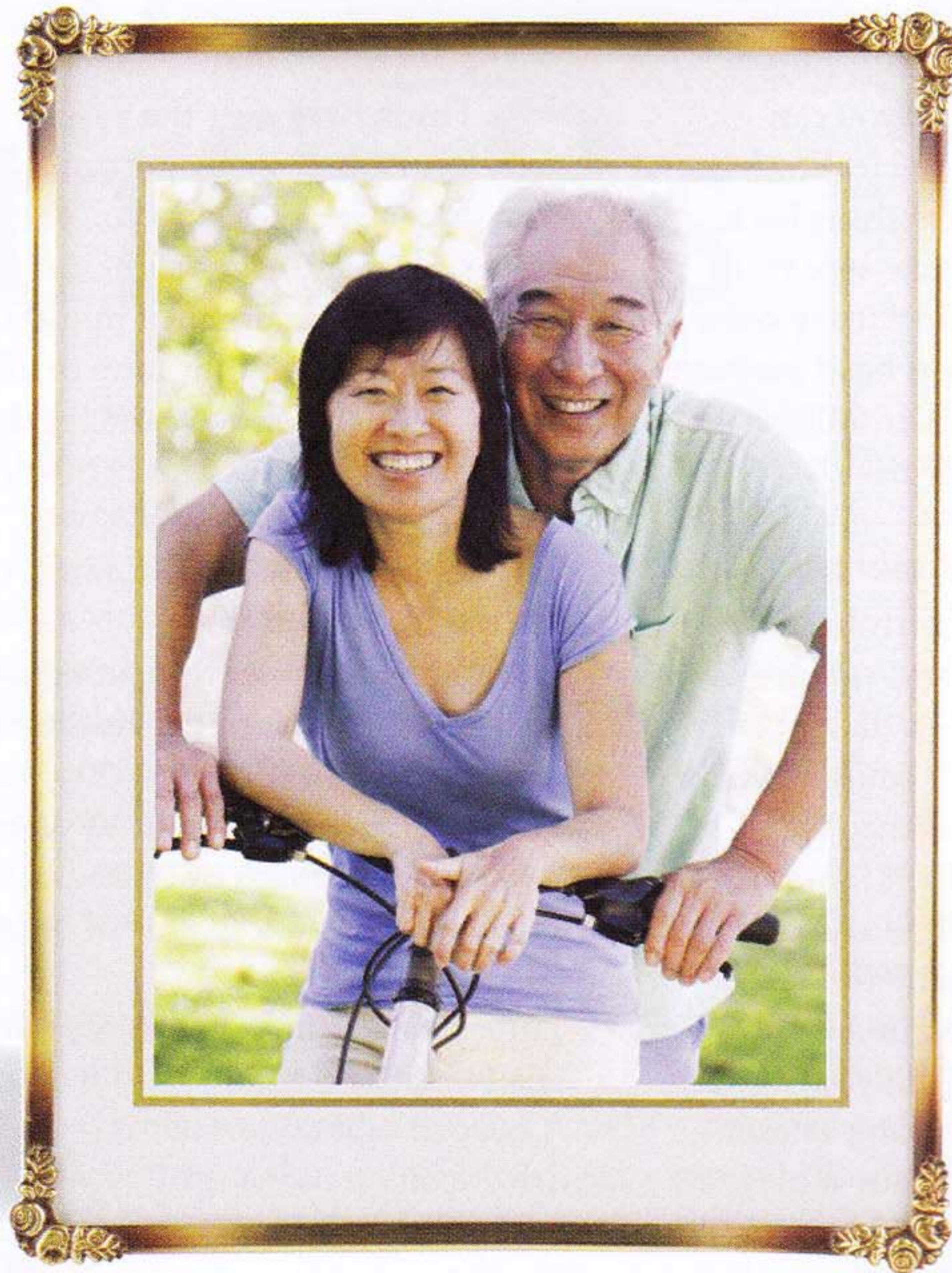


Save Our Smiles

Missing teeth is not just unattractive. It can have serious health implications. Dental surgeon CHENG ENG WAH explains how the state of teeth and gums connects to general wellbeing, and how teeth age.



It used to be that past a certain age, people could expect to be left with only a few real teeth. The good news is, these days many treatments can be used to replace damaged and missing teeth and this can make a huge difference to your quality of life.

Numerous studies have found that oral health problems can contribute to serious

medical conditions, including an increased risk of heart disease, strokes and diabetes. Poor oral health can also have serious implications for self-esteem and body confidence.

As bodies age, so do our teeth, which tend to weaken, decay and break more often. Other signs include the weakening of gums and cheeks, which may lose their ability to stretch as well

as a reduction in the amount of saliva produced by the glands in the mouth, all of which can affect the chewing process.

Ageing and Teeth

Tooth decay: Bacteria in plaque feed on the carbohydrates (sugar) in our diet to produce acids that can cause tooth decay and periodontal (gum) disease, which worsens with the reduction of

saliva production that occurs when we grow older.

A buildup around older fillings is also quite common, as are other problems such as root caries (decaying of the tooth root), which happens when the gums recede to expose the softer root surface, which decays more easily than tooth enamel.

Fight plaque buildup with regular brushing and flossing with fluoride toothpaste.

Sensitivity: As gums recede over time, areas of the teeth (unprotected by enamel) are exposed. **The result is pain when eating or drinking anything that is hot, cold, sweet, sour or spicy.**

This condition can be prevented through a simple procedure such as laser desensitising, filling or with the application of desensitising gel at your dentist.

Periodontal disease: Evidence of periodontal disease is when the gums get red and swollen with bleeding at the slightest irritation and when pockets develop between teeth and gums that trap food debris.

This disease is generally found in varying degrees in older adults and if not treated, it becomes increasingly destructive.

Studies have also shown that with periodontal disease, heart attacks are 2.7 times more likely to occur and the risk of cardiovascular diseases is 1.5 times to twice higher. For older folks, periodontal disease is the primary cause of loss of teeth.

Brittleness of teeth: With age, pulps in your teeth become smaller due to fewer blood vessels and a reduction in nerve tissues.

With less fluid content, your teeth become more brittle, which with the grinding action of chewing can further wear down the enamel of the teeth making them more likely to break and chip.

Missing teeth: This condition poses more than just an aesthetic issue. A number of things may happen – the remaining teeth may shift out of position towards gaps.

Food may get trapped in these gaps giving rise to bacterial growth and may even affect the ability to chew and speak. Dentures, dental bridges or implants are choices you can choose from to replace missing teeth.

Darkened teeth: The appearance of your teeth changes with age. There are a number of causes for this: Poor dental hygiene practices, a lifetime of consuming stain-causing food and beverages, smoking and also the changes in dentin – the bonelike tissue that underlies the tooth enamel.

A number of restorative techniques are now available to improve this condition, which can be either done at the dental clinic or in the comfort of your own home.

Dry mouth: This tends to increase as you get older and is also heightened by the use of medications, and certain medical disorders.



As saliva has an important function to play when it comes to chewing, these symptoms can be treated. Your dentist can recommend ways to restore moisture to your mouth and also address some of the oral health problems that may have caused it.

Dealing with dentures: When it comes to wearing dentures, whether complete, partial or removable, comfort is key and is largely dependent on whether the remaining ridges in your mouth can provide the necessary support.

With the removal of teeth, the remaining bone (ridge) continuously shrinks to a smaller size. As a result, the gum tissue that covers the ridge often becomes thinner and is more susceptible to irritation.

Remember: Maintaining the health of your teeth and gums when you are younger may mean less extensive restorative or reconstructive dentistry when you get older. ✕

Dr Cheng Eng Wah has been in dental practice for more than 20 years with extensive experience in Orthodontics. He is Principal Partner and Founder of I.Dental Surgeons Private Limited.