The growing proportion of adult patients living longer is driving a change within the profession. Patients no longer expect or desire dentures, they want their own teeth and are more inclined to keep up a good oral healthcare regime to ensure this happens.

The importance of retaining natural teeth cannot be over emphasised. The improved science and techniques within Root Canal Therapy/Treatment (RCT) and the advancement in equipment can normally avoid extraction and help patients to keep their teeth. There are however several problems when treating ageing patients, including:

• Reduction of space in the pulp
• Sclerosis of canals.

As the pulp and canals reduce in dimensions, it is firstly difficult to actually locate the canal and sclerosis and difficult to actually enlarge them. This means that there may well be untreated proportions of the tooth harbouring bacteria and this can lead to persistent problems.

Difficult Treatment areas
The endodontist may have to work through crowns and bridges, and this may make it difficult to see adequately what is going on and in addition, many of these teeth may have been root treated before and the original root filling may have to be removed and the canal renegotiated as part of the treatment.

Reduced saliva flow and dry mouth
The lack of saliva encourages caries and increases decay. This may be due to either ageing or even medication being taken.

A reduction in tooth sensitivity and pain
As age increases, decay and root caries incidence rise. There can also be problems with the patient’s mobility and early diagnosis. This may mean that they postpone treatments until the complaint is quite advanced.

Check for medication
The patient’s age and health status are of course considered before dental treatment, but another factor that must be explored is the medication they are taking.

Decay around previous crowns and restorations is a familiar theme in ageing patients who need RCT and these treatments can become more difficult and may also be more time consuming. This poses a problem in people who require shorter appointments for health reasons and also comfort.

Often people are nervous following a lifetime of poor experiences at the dentist and the reputation that surrounds treatments such as root canal therapies. Understanding a patient’s reservations and helping them work through their concerns will in turn help you complete treatment fast and efficiently.

Considering the age factor
A patient’s age can affect how you carry out endo treatment. Dr Michael Sultan looks at some of the problem areas

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Dr Michael Sultan
BDS MSc DFO
is a specialist in Endodontics and the clinical director of EndoCare.

Michael qualified at Bristol University in 1986. He worked as a general dental practitioner for five years before commencing specialist studies at Guy’s Hospital, London. To talk to a member of the EndoCare team call 020 7224 0999 or email reception@endocare.co.uk or for more information please visit www.endocare.co.uk.

About the author
Dr Michael Sultan
BDS MSc DFO
is a specialist in Endodontics and the clinical director of EndoCare.

Master of Science in Restorative & Aesthetic Dentistry
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Call Smile-on to find out more:
tel: 020 7400 8989  email: info@smile-on.com
web: www.smile-on.com/msc