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Basic Science Question:

What are the changes in oral mucosa in older adults?

Report:

Oral Mucosa: mucosal lining of the mouth covering everything in the oral cavity besides teeth

- Main function: protects underlying tissue such as nerves, fat, muscle, and blood supplies and also blocks the entry of pathogens and toxins into the tissue
- Consists of an epithelial layer and underlying connective tissue layer called the propria lamina

Changes in Oral Mucous Membrane:

- With age, there is a constant thinning of the oral mucosa
- Appears thin and smooth with a loss of elasticity and stippling
- Tongue also appears smoother due to the loss of filiform papillae
- The thinning results in susceptibility to entry of pathogens and toxins into the oral tissue
- Use of prosthetic appliances such as dentures also have potential to alter mucosal integrity if not properly maintained

Stratified epithelium:

- Loss of elastic fibers
- Mucosal epithelial cells also synthesize substances such as keratin and laminin that help to maintain the mucosal surface/aid in natural epithelial turnover. With age, there is diminished keratinization, therefore less epithelial turn over

Lamina propria:

- Thins
- Increased collagen ratio results in fibrotic tissue

Changes in salivary glands and salivary secretion with aging:

- Saliva protects the oral cavity, airway, and digestive tract
- With advancing age, there is a degeneration of major and minor salivary glands
- Overall change results in reduced salivary flow, ultimately leading to mouth dryness and dental caries

References:

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