

The role of dental care in overall health

Our oral health both impacts and is impacted by overall health. Good oral hygiene is an essential part of maintaining your wellness. Regular dental checkups can help ensure any issues are caught or treated early.



Ways oral health interacts with overall health:

- Evidence has connected mouth bacteria to endocarditis, pneumonia, cardiovascular disease and Alzheimer's.
- Gum disease, a common condition, can become periodontitis if left untreated.
- Medications can impact saliva flow. Saliva is important for oral health. It helps neutralize acid, support digestion and prevent tooth decay and gum disease.
- Oral health issues can impact mental health and quality of life. Evidence shows that people with periodontal disease may avoid social contact. You may not be able to enjoy food in the same way. Bad breath or missing teeth can cause feelings of embarrassment or shame.

If you're not a Dental Plan member, you can add the coverage with guaranteed acceptance.

- The spouse or dependent of an RTOERO member with extended health insurance can join the dental plan, even if the primary member doesn't.
- New dental applicants must stay in the plan for at least 24 months.

Details about RTOERO's dental plan are available at rtoero.ca/insurance/dental-plan/ or contact the RTOERO benefits team to discuss your needs: 1-800-361-9888.

New: discounted phones and rate plans for RTOERO members

RTOERO has partnered with the TELUS Exclusive Partner Program to bring you exclusive savings on cellphones, rate plans, high-speed internet, SmartHome Security, health solutions and more. Visit rtoero.ca/telus and complete the form to access your offers.

Honour Black history in February and beyond

February isn't the only time we should learn about and celebrate Black history and excellence, but the opportunities this month are abundant. Look for virtual and in-person events and workshops to participate in. Here are some other suggestions:

Visit local events and heritage sites

Explore Black heritage sites near you to learn about local Black history. Use Google to search for options for Black cultural centres, museums and heritage sites. Your visit doesn't have to happen in February but get to know what's around you. When travelling in Canada, consider making it a point to stop at Black historic sites.

Watch films curated by the National Film Board

The National Film Board offers a playlist called Black Communities in Canada: A Rich History. "This playlist is intended to provide a glimpse of the multi-layered lives of Canada's diverse Black communities."

Find the English films at nfb.ca/playlist/nfb_celebrates_black_history_month/

Find the French films at: <https://www.onf.ca/selection/mois-de-lhistoire-des-noirs>

Diversify your reading list

Reading offers a unique opportunity to understand experiences and narratives that are different from ours. It can broaden our worldviews, and, like through other forms of art, the lessons and stories can leave us changed. Here are some books by Black Canadians to consider – perhaps choose one to start this month:

The Day-Breakers by Michael Fraser
Invisible Boy by Harrison Mooney
Finding Edward by Sheila Murray
In the Upper Country by Kai Thomas

RTOERO's Future of Aging Summit brings together thought leaders, changemakers

Registration is now open at agingsummit.ca for the Future of Aging Summit in Toronto, Canada, from May 15 to 17, 2024. The international event is designed for policymakers, researchers, engineers, designers, planners, community organizers, advocates, and anyone else focused on supporting healthy aging, ending ageism and building age-friendly societies.

Help promote the summit

Consider if you have any contacts in your network who may be interested in attending the summit. For example, members of a municipal age-friendly committee, city planners, or staff at local non-profits that support older adults. Find sample text you can share on the summit site: agingsummit.rtoero.ca/promotion-kit/

Why is RTOERO hosting this event?

The Future of Aging Summit is part of RTOERO's Vibrant Voices Advocacy focus. Through the summit, RTOERO will continue to foster an interconnected network of people across sectors who, like us, believe in a better future—together and want to help create it.

New resource: Money and You – Seniors Edition

RTOERO's partner, the Canadian Foundation for Economic Education, has released a new resource to support the financial well-being of older Canadians. Money and You: Seniors Edition includes 14 downloadable modules covering a range of topics to help you:

- Establish or build your base of financial knowledge
- Make wise financial decisions
- Set and achieve goals
- Maintain good financial health, supporting your overall health

Access it here: moneyandyou seniorsedition.com

Indigenous community and drums: Mother Earth's heartbeat

Written by Shaneeka Forrester for RTOERO, Cree artist, mother, and advocate from Brunswick House First Nation, planting roots in Simcoe County, Ontario.

For many months, I have felt called to share information about the drum and its significance in our communities. I have gone back and forth about what level of sharing would be appropriate in this context. As I continue on this journey of sharing snippets of who I am and what I have learned as an Indigenous woman on Turtle Island, I try to be mindful of what stories can be shared without formal protocol for teachings.

I have been raised to be respectful towards our knowledge and how we present it to the world. Certain topics teeter on the edge of lessons that would be more appropriately shared by a knowledge keeper or elder within the community. In the information I share, I try to be simplistic and present it in a way that helps us navigate Indigenous spaces and culture more respectfully as allies.

So what is the drum? Who makes them, and why are they the centre of so many of our celebrations/ gatherings?

The drum is similar to many other drums used by individuals worldwide. Our drum is created with a wooden frame and rawhide across the top and bottom strung together by cords of the same material. Handheld drums only have one side completely covered.

Many individuals in our communities make large drums for pow wows and community gatherings. There are also individuals who make smaller drums that an individual uses singularly.

When a person comes to create these items, they are typically presented with a teaching about the object's origins and the responsibilities of carrying it. There are specific ways we can interact with our drums and how we must appropriately handle them. These items are sacred to us.

There are many types of drums, and the two I am familiar with are what I have been exposed to as an urban Indigenous person growing up in Toronto. However, like many things in Indigenous culture, they vary across communities and territories.

The drum's sound represents Mother Earth's heartbeat and grounds us in our traditional ways of being. We use drums as the center of our gatherings and move clockwise around them as a community. Everything about how we interact with this item is rooted in traditional ways of being and has larger teachings connected to it.

Some drums are brought into ceremonial spaces and used to help connect with ancestors. When I enter a space and hear our drums in the distance, I feel an

immediate sense of connection, cultural pride and grounding. My body instinctively begins to move along to its beat, and eventually, I join my community dancing. Many friendship centres and Indigenous agencies that serve communities have drumming socials that are open to the public. I encourage you to attend one in your area and feel the heartbeat of Mother Earth for yourself.



RTOERO Foundation announces funding for four new projects

The RTOERO Foundation is thrilled to announce its grant recipients for 2024. After careful consideration, the Foundation's Peer Review Panel awarded \$127,100 in grants to organizations that support healthy aging for older adults.

Funding for these projects is made possible through the generosity of RTOERO Foundation donors, most of whom are RTOERO members. The following projects address priority issues that affect older adults including geriatric research, social engagement and seniors' health and well-being:

Co-Designing Patient Education Materials for Older Adults Living with HIV

Organization: Sinai Health and University Health Network (UHN)

Funding amount: \$49,900

Intergenerational Nature Challenge Activities

Organization: Heartland Forest Nature Experience

Funding amount: \$17,500

MixAbilities: Seniors Module Outreach

Organization: H'art Centre

Funding amount: \$25,160

Cultivating Young Dementia Advocates: A Toolkit for Youth Engagement

Organization: Alzheimer Society of Ontario

Funding amount: \$34,540

Visit <https://rtoero.ca/rtoero-foundation/our-work/projects-we-fund/> for more information on donor-funded grants.