

# The Dental Disease and Lupus CONNECTION

**Dental infections can intensify the harm caused by lupus, and lupus can contribute to oral / dental problems. It's a harmful connection that can go both ways.**

**When the immune system is “quieted” by drugs that control lupus, such as Benlysta and Imuran, the dental bacteria can travel more easily, spreading their harmful damage.**

Infections cause our bodies to develop inflammation. Infected gums become red, and puffy and may bleed easily. And when they become inflamed, alert messages are sent throughout the body, intensifying inflammation elsewhere. So, even though teeth are not directly connected to the kidneys, lungs, or heart, dental infections and inflammation can contribute to lupus-related complications throughout the body.

## Dry mouth

Lupus and a related disease—Sjogren’s Syndrome—can damage glands that produce saliva. And because saliva helps protect against cavities and other dental diseases, a persistent dry mouth increases the chances of developing those problems.

## Mouth ulcers

Lupus can cause ulcers in the mouth, especially during flares. Some lupus medications cause ulcers by enabling an overgrowth of a fungus in the mouth.

## How to Prevent Dental Infections

- » **Excellent oral hygiene.** Bacteria that create cavities and gum diseases only cause damage if left on the teeth. Thorough daily oral hygiene can remove bacteria before that happens, but the germs will soon begin re-attaching to the teeth. Each of three tooth surfaces (cheek, biting, and tongue sides) should be brushed twice daily with a soft bristle brush. Bacteria should be removed from the two side surfaces of each tooth once a day with dental floss, or a floss substitute such as opal pix.
- » **Fluoride.** Because fluoride helps prevent cavities from forming by strengthening teeth, fluoridated toothpaste is advised. And if you are at a higher risk of dental infections because of a dry mouth, your dentist may also suggest fluoride supplements, such as rinses or gels.
- » **Eliminate Dry Mouth.** If a “dry mouth” becomes an ongoing challenge, your dentist may suggest using an “artificial saliva” product. You can also stimulate your salivary glands by chewing on sugarless gum or sucking on sugarless candy.
- » **Rinses, gels, and drugs for mouth ulcers.** Your dentist and physician can help determine the cause of mouth ulcers, which will influence how the ulcers can best be controlled and treated. Wound healing and soothing rinses such as Peroxyl may be helpful.
- » **Denture Care.** To help prevent inflammation and ulcers, dentures should be removed and soaked overnight in denture cleaning solutions.

## Antibiotics?

Antibiotics are seldom needed before dental procedures. However, if lupus has affected the heart, your physician and dentist may want to consider an antibiotic.

## YOUR FEEDBACK IS IMPORTANT

Please type in this website and take a quick 2-3 minute survey to help us improve our communications about this important topic.



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