

The Dental and Multiple Sclerosis CONNECTION

Dental cavities and gum diseases are bacterial infections that can make your MS symptoms worse.

Bacterial infections can spread more easily throughout our bodies when certain drugs used to control MS flares, such as Gilenya and Tysabri, “quiet” the immune system. Even a slight fever from infections, including dental, can increase flares.

Other drugs used for pain, fatigue, and bladder and other spasms can make it easier for bacterial dental infections to develop and get worse because they can reduce the amount of saliva we produce, creating a dry mouth.

How to Prevent Dental Infections

- » **Excellent oral hygiene.** The bacteria can only do dental damage if they stay on the teeth. Daily oral hygiene may not seem important when you are experiencing other health issues, but it will help prevent cavities, gum disease, and other complications too.
- » **Eliminate Dry Mouth.** Relieve dry mouth by sucking on sugarless candy, chewing sugarless gum, or using an “artificial saliva” product. Toothpaste and rinses with fluoride also help protect teeth.
- » **Regular dental exams.** Cavities and gum infections may not be noticeable at first, but dentists are able to identify them early and treat them before they become a problem. Regular dental exams are important but try to make appointments work for you by scheduling them at times when you are not having a flare or relapse. Sitting in a dental chair and keeping your mouth open may be difficult. Let your dentist know if you need to limit the length of your appointments.

Make daily oral hygiene easier and effective

- » **Be thorough.** Each tooth has five surfaces where bacteria collect and multiply. Brushing can remove the bacteria from three surfaces (cheek, biting, and tongue sides), and you can use floss or a floss substitute such as Opal Pix for the two side surfaces. Bacteria will begin to reattach to teeth quickly, so it is important to try to brush twice per day and floss once per day, if possible.
- » **Avoid fatigue.** On difficult days or during flares, it might seem easier to skip brushing and flossing. It is important to continue being thorough but make adjustments as needed. For example, clean the top teeth in the morning and the bottom teeth at night, but be thorough.
- » **Make Modifications.** Consider a non-traditional toothbrush if grasping a standard brush is difficult. Electric toothbrushes have enlarged handles that can be easier to hold. Or your dentist can make the handle of a regular toothbrush larger by adding plastic or attaching the handle grip from a bicycle by filling it with plaster.
- » **Ask for help.** If weakness, tremors, numbness, or tingling hinder safe and effective oral hygiene, request help from a caregiver.
- » **Use fluoridated toothpaste and, if your dentist recommends it, a mouth rinse.** Fluoride helps protect teeth from the harmful effects of bacteria. Look for products that also have antimicrobial ingredients, such as peroxide and baking soda to help kill the bacteria. Antibacterial rinses may be useful, too.
- » **Denture Care.** The area beneath full and partial dentures can become irritated and inflamed if the appliances are not removed, cleaned, and soaked overnight. If your hands feel weak or tremble, take special care in removing dentures so they don't break if accidentally dropped. One option is to take them out over a sink filled with water. They will splash, but are less likely to break.

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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