

The Dental and Parkinson's Disease CONNECTION

Dental cavities and gum diseases are bacterial infections that can increase the risk of serious Parkinson's complications.

Compared with the challenges that can come with Parkinson's Disease, dental considerations may seem trivial, but dental disease can have a significant impact on your health and even contribute to serious complications.

Aspiration Pneumonia

The risk of aspiration pneumonia, a particularly serious complication, increases when facial muscles weaken, chewing and swallowing become difficult, and choking episodes become more frequent. Add missing, decayed, or loose teeth to the mix, and the risk of choking and aspiration increases. As that occurs, the bacteria that cause dental infections can be inhaled into the lungs, increasing the risk of pneumonia or other respiratory complications.

Speech and Emotional Challenges

Speech problems that may occur with Parkinson's Disease can become more severe as a result of loose, missing, or diseased teeth. Drooling can also get worse, adding to frustration and embarrassment.

Other Infections

As the bacteria from dental disease multiply and enter the blood stream, they can create infections elsewhere. This can be particularly serious if you have deep brain stimulation or other medical devices, such as artificial knees and hips, because they, too, can become infected.

Dry mouth

Saliva helps prevent cavities and gum diseases. However, some drugs used to ease muscle rigidity and other challenges caused by PD can contribute to a "dry mouth" by reducing our ability to produce saliva. And some medications used to control drooling also reduce saliva. You may want to try an "artificial saliva" product such as Biotene.

Dentures

Dentures can create irritation and ulcers, especially if a dry mouth or pooling saliva make them difficult to hold in place. Be sure to remove, clean, and soak them overnight to allow your mouth to rest. If they feel loose, talk to your dentist about using adhesive creams, or even the possibility of implants.

Prevent Harmful Dental Problems

Oral hygiene

- » **Be thorough.** Dental decay and gum diseases are caused by bacteria that stick to teeth. After being removed by brushing and flossing, they soon begin to reattach so thorough oral hygiene is needed daily. 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.
- » **Use fluoridated toothpaste** that also has antibacterial ingredients, such as peroxide with baking soda, to protect teeth from decay and also kill bacteria not removed with brushing and flossing. Ask your dentist if a fluoride and/or an antimicrobial mouth rinse would be helpful.
- » **Schedule time for oral hygiene when you've got the energy to do it well.** If you take levodopa and experience the "on-off" effect of your medication, you may find it easier to brush and floss during "on" periods.
- » **Make Modifications.** Grasping a narrow toothbrush handle may be difficult. If so, your dentist can enlarge it with additional plastic, or the grip of a bicycle handle by filling it with plaster. Electric toothbrushes have larger handles, and they may make brushing easier.

Be comfortable during dental appointments

- » **Schedule dental appointments when you're feeling good.** Shorter appointments while your medication is "on," even if they need to be more frequent, may be preferred if it becomes difficult to keep your mouth open for longer periods.
- » **How do you want to be seated?** Dental chairs are frequently placed in a reclined position. Being upright rather than reclined may help you feel more secure, especially if you're worried about choking episodes. Tell your dentist what you prefer.
- » **Be certain to inform your dentist if you have a Deep Brain Stimulation device.** You may be advised to take an antibiotic before certain appointments, or have it turned off when use of certain dental equipment is used.

YOUR FEEDBACK IS IMPORTANT

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DentalLifeline.org/parkinsons

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