

The Dental Disease and Organ Transplant CONNECTION

Bacteria that cause cavities and gum diseases can create serious complications for transplant patients.

Cavities and gum diseases are bacterial infections. Drugs to prevent rejection of a transplant reduce our ability to fight infections. This can allow dental bacteria to spread more easily throughout the body, adding to infection risks elsewhere! To prevent complications, it is important to have excellent dental health before and after a transplant.

Before a Transplant

Anyone facing the need for a transplant should have a dental examination and necessary treatment to avoid a delay or denial in receiving a transplant.

After a Transplant

After a transplant, dental emergencies should be treated quickly to prevent complications. This is especially important during the first several months when many drugs are used to prevent rejection, and your body's resistance to infection is seriously weakened.

Elective or non-essential dental treatment should be resumed after your transplant team and dentist have discussed timing and appropriate antibiotic precautions, if needed.

Transplant drugs can cause unpleasant, but manageable, side effects in the mouth

- » **Dry mouth** results when certain drugs reduce the amount of saliva we produce, which can make talking and swallowing difficult. Risk increases for sores developing, which can become infected. The dryness also encourages cavities and gum disease because saliva protects against those infections.
- » **Overgrowth of gums** can be caused by some anti-rejection drugs. The extra gum tissue can increase the chances of developing periodontal (gum) disease because it can make oral hygiene more difficult. When severe, it can even interfere with eating.

» **Thrush** (Candidiasis) is an infection that causes painful sores on the tongue, inside surface of the cheeks, and even in the throat. That can make eating and swallowing uncomfortable. The infection is caused by a fungus living in our mouths which is normally kept under control by our immune system. Because transplant drugs used to prevent rejection “quiet” our immune system, the fungus can grow out of control, creating the problem. Medication and rinses may be recommended by your transplant team or dentist since it is important the sores not become infected.

Prevent Harmful Dental Problems

- » **Increase Saliva.** To counter the effect of dryness, an “artificial saliva” product may be helpful, or chewing sugarless gum or sucking on sugarless candy.
- » **Help prevent sores** that may develop in your mouth from becoming infected by using soothing rinses that promote healing, such as Peroxyl.
- » **Watch for Gum Overgrowth.** Excellent oral hygiene may not prevent gum overgrowth, but it may help control it by reducing inflammation. Be watchful for the excessive growth of gums and ask your transplant team if the dosing of any drug that contributes to this problem can be reduced or substituted. You should also talk to your dentist. The excess gum tissue can be surgically removed if necessary.
- » **Oral Hygiene.** Remove the bacteria that cause cavities and gum disease from your teeth by brushing twice daily with a soft bristle brush and, ideally, floss once a day (or use a floss substitute such as opal-pix). Thorough and daily is important because the germs re-attach to the teeth and will cause problems if not kept off.
- » **Fluoride.** Use fluoridated toothpaste to strengthen teeth against cavities. Toothpaste that contains peroxide with baking soda can help kill germs not removed with brushing and flossing. Your dentist may also suggest using fluoride or antimicrobial rinses. Talk to your dentist about the possible benefit of using a fluoride rinse or having fluoride applied at dental appointments.
- » **Take care of Dentures.** Full and partial dentures should be soaked overnight. This will give the gums some relief and help prevent sores, which can become infected.

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.



DentalLifeline.org/organtransplant

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