

How medications affect your oral health



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When patients think about the factors that affect the overall health of our mouth and **teeth**, they tend to think about the obvious things such as the food you eat and how frequently you brush your teeth and floss. However, most patients do not consider the effect that their prescription medication has on their oral health.

According to the American Dental Association, nearly half of all Americans take at least one prescription drug. This number is even more pronounced with older adults with 90 percent of adults over 65 taking at least one prescription medication.

Understanding how prescription drugs can hurt the inside of our mouths is important. Here are a few ways that medications can negatively affect your oral health.

Dry Mouth

The biggest concern regarding prescription medication and oral health is the fact that many medications cause dry mouth which in turn makes a person more likely to suffer from tooth decay, mouth sores and oral infections. Elderly individuals are more likely to deal with these issues because they are more likely to take multiple prescription drugs.

According to the American Pharmacists Association, more than 500 medications can contribute to dry mouth. These medications include anti-hypertensive drugs for high blood pressure, Urological medications that improve urinary flow, anxiety medications such as Lorazepam and antidepressants such as Zoloft.

Saliva is crucial for our body. It breaks down food and has a filtering effect on bacteria in the mouth. Saliva gets rid of plaque and bathes your teeth in a mineral-rich solution that maintains your teeth's resistance to decay.

It is important for patients to understand the medication they use and alert their dentist and physician if any of the medications they use are causing severe and consistent dry mouth.

A dentist can prescribe substitute saliva sprays or toothpaste that can alleviate dry mouth. There are even over the counter saliva sprays. These over the counter products also come in rinse, swab, gel and tablet forms.

Surgical Risk

Patients who are taking medicines that treat bone diseases such as osteoporosis. These drugs help prevent the loss of bone density; however, these drugs known as Bisphosphonates can cause complications during any type of

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dental surgery such as installing implants or extracting teeth.

Bisphosphonates block the bone's ability to break down and build up, preventing it from healing properly. Patients on bone density medication are prone to having bone necrosis of the jaw after oral surgery, meaning parts of the jaw bone are dying from lack of blood. This is more likely to occur with elderly patients because they are more likely to be on bone density medication.

It is important to let your dentist know if you are currently on any bisphosphonates in order to avoid any complications that can arise from oral surgery. If your dentist is aware that you have a history of bone disease, then you can discuss if surgery is even the best option.

Blood Thinners

Patients who are on blood thinners and other forms of anticoagulant medications should alert their dentist that they are on these types of medications before surgery. These medications are great at preventing heart disease and stroke, but they can cause bleeding issues during oral surgery.

The best way to prevent oral health issues due to medication is to talk with your doctor and your dentist about the effects that prescription medication can have on your mouth.

How our medications affect our mouths is not the first thing on anyone's mind, but if you take the time to discuss your medications with your dentist it will do a world of difference.

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