

Chronic Health Conditions

Oral health conditions are associated with other chronic health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, abscesses and heart infections.



Diabetes

For a person with diabetes, good oral health becomes even more important. Diabetes is associated with **dry mouth** and an increased risk for infections. Without saliva to rinse the mouth, bacteria can grow. Diabetes can also make it difficult for the body to heal infections in the mouth. Untreated or uncontrolled diabetes can increase a person's risk for developing gum disease, and untreated gum disease has an effect on a person's diabetes.

Gum Disease

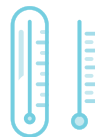
Gum disease is an infection that causes red, swollen and bleeding gums. Gingivitis is early-stage gum disease, while periodontitis is advanced gum disease. When left untreated, gum disease can eventually lead to tooth loss. The most common cause of gum disease is the build-up of bacteria. Brushing with a fluoride toothpaste and flossing removes **plaque** to reduce bacteria in the mouth.

Abscesses

Poor dental care can lead to bleeding gums, gum pain, tooth sensitivity, tooth pain and possibly tooth loss. Left untreated, these conditions can lead to a rare but serious condition called an abscess. An abscess is a pocket of pus that forms in the gums of an infected tooth. An abscess needs to be treated by a dentist. Proper toothbrushing and cleaning between teeth will reduce the risk for abscesses.

Symptoms of a Dental Abscess

- Tooth feeling loose.
- Pain in surrounding teeth, gum, jaw or cheek.
- Swelling in gums or face.
- A bubble or "pimple" on the gums.
- Swollen lymph glands in neck.
- Loss of appetite.
- Difficulty chewing or speaking.
- Redness.
- Bleeding.
- Fever.



Dry Mouth

Condition when your mouth feels dry, even when drinking plenty of water.

Plaque

A sticky substance that builds up on your teeth. It is made of bacteria, saliva and food residue.



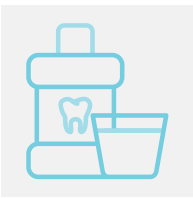
Medications

As a caregiver, you should be familiar with common oral health medications. These medications may be part of a person's daily mouth care session. You should always consult with the dental team before starting new oral health medication.



Fluoride

Fluoride is a natural element that strengthens teeth and prevents decay caused by bacteria. Usually, the fluoride in toothpaste and in the water supply is enough to protect teeth. If a stronger fluoride treatment is needed, a dentist may prescribe a rinse, a gel, a toothpaste with a higher fluoride concentration or a fluoride varnish.



Antimicrobial Products

Mouthwashes kill the bacteria that lead to tooth decay and gum disease. You can purchase mouthwashes over the counter. If necessary, dentists can also prescribe stronger antibiotic mouthwashes (see the [Product Suggestions](#) page for more).



Products for Dry Mouth

Dry mouth is a symptom of some medications and medical conditions. Dry mouth can be treated with mouthwashes, sprays or gels. These can be purchased at the store or through a prescription from the dentist (see the [Product Suggestions](#) page for more).

Tooth Repair Products

For early-stage tooth decay, a dentist may prescribe a mineral fluoride product that prevents tooth decay from progressing.

Motivational Interviewing: Chronic Health Conditions

Better Conversations, Better Oral Health

Use these motivational interviewing (MI) strategies to talk about oral health with the person you support.



MI Strategy for the Person You Support

Use open-ended questions to assess the person's knowledge of a topic.

Example:

"Help me understand what the dentist said about your sore tooth."

"Now that you talked to the dentist, what do you want to do differently?"



MI Strategy for Guardian or Family Member

Use open-ended questions to assess a family member's knowledge of a topic.

Example:

"How comfortable do you feel about your knowledge of [person you support]'s diagnosis?"



Adapting MI Strategies

Remember to allow extra time for a response.

Next Steps

These are additional resources that will help you and the person you support keep thinking about this topic after your conversation is over:

- [Monthly Brushing & Flossing Tracker Handout](#)
- [Chronic Conditions Video](#)

