

Medications and your teeth.

Medications are routinely prescribed by physicians to treat medical diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease, osteoporosis and many other conditions requiring medications for control. These medications are required to treat the causes of these diseases but all medications, whether taken by mouth or injected, come with a risk of side effects. Hundreds of drugs are known to cause problems in the mouth and can affect your teeth. It is important to discuss your medications with your dentist so that he can make you aware of common oral side effects related to those medications and alter treatment planning to account for medications you are taking.

Dry mouth or xerostomia is a common side effect of taking medications. Medications which can cause dry mouth include antihistamines, anti-anxiety medications including diazepam, antidepressants such as Zoloft and Prozac, high blood pressure medications including calcium channel blockers, diuretics and ACE inhibitors, anti-parkinson drugs and anti-psychotic medications. A decrease in saliva makes it hard to eat, swallow and digest foods and greatly increases the risks of tooth decay. We can ask your physician to change medication or to adjust dosage if it will not compromise your medical treatment. If medication cannot be changed, in general it is wise to sip water often. Avoid drinks with caffeine, such as coffee, tea, and sodas. Caffeine will decrease saliva flow since it is a diuretic. Do not use alcohol or tobacco. Avoid mouth washes with alcohol. Be aware that spicy or salty foods may cause pain in a dry mouth. Chewing gum flavored with xylitol sweetener can help stimulate saliva production. Xylitol is a sweetener that does not increase plaque build up and has been shown to reduce caries.

A side effect of anticoagulant medication such as aspirin or anticoagulants like heparin or warfarin is abnormal bleeding or reduced ability of blood to clot. These medications are prescribed to treat strokes or heart disease; however, they can cause bleeding problems during oral surgery or periodontal treatment. If you're having dental treatment, it is important to tell your dentist about these medications, especially if the dental procedure may involve bleeding.

Medications which contain tetracyclines cause permanent staining in teeth and bones. It is important to avoid all tetracycline products in children because their teeth are forming and permanent staining can result. This permanent discoloration varies from yellow or gray to brown. Minocycline hydrochloride, a semisynthetic derivative of tetracycline often used for the treatment of acne, has been shown to cause pigmentation of a variety of tissues including skin, thyroid, nails, sclera, teeth, conjunctiva and bone. Adult-onset tooth discoloration following long-term ingestion of tetracycline and minocycline has also been reported. The remarkable side-effect of minocycline on the oral cavity is the singular occurrence of "black bones", "black or green roots" and blue-gray to gray hue darkening of the crowns of permanent teeth. In order to mask the staining of teeth cosmetic dentistry techniques such as crowns, bonding procedures, veneers, and in some cases, bleaching may be used to lighten or cover teeth with tetracycline stains.

Medications used for seizures, immunosuppressant drugs such as those taken by organ transplant patients and calcium channel blockers used for high blood pressure control can cause gingival overgrowth also called gingival hyperplasia. With meticulous oral hygiene it may be possible to avoid this side effect. Tissue overgrowth can make it hard to practice good oral hygiene and is not pleasing to look at. Often a surgical procedure called a gingivectomy is required to cut away the overgrown tissue.

There are many other side effects which can arise from taking medications and they are too numerous to mention in one article. It is extremely important to provide a complete list of medications and health conditions for which you are being treated to your dentist so that you can be informed of any potential side effects they might have on your oral health and how to avoid or cope with those side effects. Be sure to take care of your mouth by regularly brushing and flossing your teeth and getting regular dental checkups.

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