



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Medications To Improve Health Could be Detrimental to Oral Health

With the coming of warmer weather, millions of allergy sufferers will reach into their medicine cabinets for relief. They'll join the millions more who treat or manage a range of diseases with medications. From antihistamines to blood pressure regulators, many medications can cause side effects that negatively affect oral health.

“Modern medicines do some truly amazing things,” said Dr. Max Anderson, DDS, a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plan Association. “However, it’s important to make sure that all of the health professionals in your life, including your dentist, know about the medications you’re taking so they can help you manage any side effects.”

Xerostomia, known commonly as dry mouth, is listed as a side effect on more than 400 medications. Without adequate saliva flow, bacteria, plaque and the by-products they produce can accumulate in the mouth and make a person more vulnerable to gum disease and tooth decay.

Another effect of medications is gingival enlargement, a condition in which the gums become swollen and begin to grow over the teeth. Eventually, this overgrowth of gum tissue can cause a severe periodontal infection. Calcium channel blockers, sometimes used to control high blood pressure and other health issues, are just one category of medications that can cause overgrowth of gums. Monitoring and early intervention from dental and health professionals can reduce the likelihood of gingival enlargement in at-risk patients.

Oral health can be affected by other medication side effects. Some oral contraceptives and blood pressure control medications have been linked to oral sores and inflammation. One of the agents used in tetracycline, a medication used for acne treatment, can discolor teeth and the underlying bone. A number of medications, ranging from certain antibiotics to ibuprofen, can produce lesions or ulcers in the mouth that often disappear after a patient stops taking the medication.

Many cough drops, liquid medications and antacid tablets contain sugars and can leave behind a sticky residue on teeth, making them more susceptible to decay. Sugar in medications can be particularly problematic for children on long-term therapies for chronic medical conditions. Unable to swallow pills, many children receive medications in liquid form, often sweetened to make them more palatable.

Drugs affecting the central nervous system can negatively affect oral health. When patients experience side effects such as fatigue, lethargy and motor impairment, it becomes more difficult for them to take care of their own oral health. In fact, adults, taking antidepressants and antihypertensives were found to have elevated levels of plaque and the clinical signs of gingivitis.

“It’s important to tell your dentist about any prescription or non-prescription drugs you are using. They can help monitor your oral health and suggest ways to combat any of the possible side effects,” said Dr. Anderson.

Delta Dental Plans Association, based in Oak Brook, IL, is a national network of independent not-for-profit dental service corporations specializing in providing dental benefits programs to 47 million Americans in more than 81,000 employee groups throughout the country.

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