

# Dialysis and Dental Care

## The Oral Connection

“Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey understands why dental hygiene is so important for someone who is on dialysis ... do you?”



Most people who are on dialysis do not connect oral hygiene with infection.

In fact, being on dialysis may place you at greater risk for oral infections than those people who don't have chronic kidney disease. There are many types of infections that you may experience, such as:

- Blood infections.
- Infection of the heart valve.
- Infection of the artery lining, which can lead to an infection of your dialysis access (fistula, graft or catheter).
- Peritonitis, if you are on CAPD or Cycler Dialysis.

Although at greater risk for infection, many patients do not seek appropriate dental care:

- 41 percent of dialysis patients have not seen a dentist in the last two years.
- 34 percent of dialysis patients have not seen a dentist in the last five years.

When you go to the dentist, it is CRITICAL that you speak with your physician and that antibiotics have been ordered properly before any dental procedure.

Because of your kidney condition, you may have:

- A higher amount of plaque formation.
- Erosion of tongue surface due to build up of toxins in the blood.
- Loosened teeth due to bone disease.
- Dry mouth from the effects of medications, which causes an increase in dental problems, such as gum disease and cavities.

You may experience:

- Dry mouth.
- Off taste (metallic or other).
- Bad breath.
- Overgrowth of your gums, if you have had a kidney transplant, due to the effects of the transplant rejection drugs.
- Red tongue and or burning mouth due to effects of low red blood cells.
- Gingivitis and bleeding of the gums.
- Thrush or candida after kidney transplant.

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If you have chronic kidney disease, be sure to review these important dos and don'ts:

## Do:

- **Have regular dental checkups.**
- **Go for a cleaning every six months.**
- **Brush your teeth at least two times a day using fluoride toothpaste.**
- **Floss once a day.**
- **Get dental clearance before you go on a kidney transplant waiting list.**
- **Let your dentist know if you have kidney disease, are on dialysis or have received a kidney transplant.**
- **Check with your physician to see if you need a prescription antibiotic before you have the procedure, if you are on hemodialysis or Peritoneal Dialysis.**

## Don't:

- **Smoke or chew tobacco.**
- **Chew ice because it can crack your teeth.**
- **Schedule dental procedures on a Hemodialysis treatment day because of the blood thinners used during dialysis.**
- **Ignore proper denture care and maintenance.**
- **Neglect your dental health.**

If you are taking any of the following blood thinning medications or herbal remedies, speak with your physician before a dental extraction or any invasive dental treatment:

**Oral medications:** Aspirin (salicylic acid), Motrin (ibuprofen), Aleve (naproxen), Plavix (clopidogrel), Persantine (dipyridamole), Aggrenox (aspirin with dipyridamole).

**Injectable medications:** Lovenox (enoxaparin), Fragmin (dalteparin sodium).

**Herbal/alternative medications:** Gingko Bilboa, Omega 3 fish oil, Vitamin E.

**Please note:** It can take five to seven days for aspirin to clear from your system.  
Always consult your physician before making any changes to your regular treatment plan.

Sources: Kimberly Davis, RN, Clinical Administrator of the Lillian Booth Dialysis Center. October 1998 issue of Journal of the California Dental Association. <[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)>.



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