

# Organ Transplantation and Your Mouth

Improving the Nation's Oral Health • <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov>

If you are an organ transplant patient, you are at risk for serious mouth problems. Your medical condition and side effects from your transplant medications can affect your oral health and complicate dental care. This fact sheet identifies problems you may encounter and explains how you can help keep your mouth healthy.

## PRE-TRANSPLANT DENTAL CHECK-UP

A dental check-up is an important part of your pre-transplant evaluation. Because some medications you take after transplant can cause problems in your mouth, you want your mouth to be as healthy as possible **before** your transplant procedure. Taking care of cavities, periodontal (gum) disease, and any other mouth problems ahead of time can help prevent or reduce the side effects of transplant medicines. Keeping your mouth clean and free of dental disease is important for your general health as well.

## POST-TRANSPLANT DENTAL CARE

Anti-rejection medications suppress your immune system and make it easier for you to develop infections and other problems in your mouth, including:

- Dry mouth—the “cotton mouth” feeling you get when you don’t have enough saliva to keep your mouth moist. Dry mouth increases your risk for tooth decay.
- Mouth ulcers—sores in the soft lining of the mouth that can make chewing, speaking or swallowing painful.
- Infections—such as gum disease that can harm the tissues holding the teeth in place, or thrush—a fungus infection that appears as creamy white patches in the mouth.
- Gingival overgrowth—enlarged gums that cover part of the teeth, making brushing and flossing difficult and increasing the risk for bleeding and infection.
- Tumors—mouth cancers that occur in some transplant patients, especially those who have smoked.

Once your transplant has stabilized, your dentist can treat new dental disease and help you manage any side effects of transplant medication that may occur. All mouth problems should be treated.

**It's important for your dentist and your transplant doctor to speak with each other before dental treatment.** Together, they will work out a dental care plan that safely meets your needs. For example, they may decide that you need to take antibiotics before dental treatment, or your doctor may adjust your medication.

- Make sure your dentist knows that you are a transplant patient. Give your dentist the contact information for your transplant doctor.
- Bring a list of all your medications, including over-the-counter drugs, to every dental appointment. Remember to tell your dentist if your medications have changed.
- Talk to your dentist about your general health. If you have diabetes or other health conditions, make sure your dentist knows. In the same way, talk to your transplant doctor about your oral health. Tell your doctor if you have mouth problems.

---

### **KEEPING YOUR MOUTH HEALTHY**

You can do a lot to keep your mouth healthy after your transplant procedure. Look inside your mouth daily and check how it feels with your tongue. Side effects from medications may show as white or red patches, sores, ulcers, or tumors. You may notice dryness in your mouth, a lump, or bleeding gums when you brush. Call your dentist if you notice **any** changes or problems.

Brush and floss every day. Good daily oral hygiene is vital to keeping your mouth healthy. If you have any questions about brushing and flossing, particularly if your mouth is sore, ask your dentist or dental hygienist.

---

### **REMEMBER...**

- Have a dental check-up before your transplant procedure.
- See your dentist regularly after your transplant has stabilized.
- Call your dentist when you notice any problem or change in your mouth.
- Take care of your mouth every day.

### **For additional copies of this fact sheet contact:**

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research  
National Oral Health Information Clearinghouse  
1 NOHIC Way  
Bethesda, MD 20892-3500  
1-866-232-4528  
<http://www.nidcr.nih.gov>