NIH

National Institute of Dental
and Craniofacial Research

Organ or Stem Cell Transplant and Your Mouth

KEY POINTS

- Have a dental checkup before your transplant procedure.

- See your dentist regularly after your transplant has stabilized.

- Call your dentist if you notice any problem or change in your mouth.

- Take care of your mouth by brushing and flossing every day. A healthy mouth is less likely to develop problems.

SEE YOUR DENTIST BEFORE TRANSPLANT

Before an organ or stem cell transplant, have a dental checkup. Your mouth should be as healthy as possible before your transplant procedure. Treating cavities, periodontal (gum) disease, and any other mouth problems ahead of time can help prevent or reduce the side effects of transplant drugs. Also, keeping your mouth clean and free of dental disease is important for your general health too.

SEE YOUR DENTIST AFTER TRANSPLANT

Make sure your dentist knows that you are a transplant patient. Give your dentist the contact information for your transplant doctor. Your dentist should speak with your transplant team 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 the dosage of your transplant drugs.

Bring a list of all your drugs, including over-the-counter drugs, to every dental appointment. Remember to tell your dentist if your drugs 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, tell your transplant doctor if you have mouth problems.

TELL YOUR DENTIST ABOUT MOUTH PROBLEMS

Transplant drugs suppress your immune system so that the donated organ or cells are less likely to be rejected by your body. Unfortunately, the side effects of these drugs make you more likely to develop problems in your mouth.

Tell your dentist about any problems that develop in your mouth. Transplant drugs can cause many different kinds of mouth problems.

Your dentist can help you manage the mouth problems caused by transplant drugs:

- **Infections:** When your immune system is suppressed, you are at much greater risk of developing infections, such as yeast (thrush) or herpes simplex infections, and tooth decay. Get treatment if you experience redness, painful or sensitive areas, swelling, pus, white patches, fever, or other problems.

- **Dry mouth:** Not having enough saliva to keep your mouth moist can lead to tooth decay.

- **Mouth ulcers:** Sores in the soft lining of the mouth can make chewing, speaking, or swallowing painful.

- **Enlarged gums:** Gums can grow so large that they cover part of the teeth, making brushing and flossing difficult and increasing the chance of bleeding and infection.

- **Mouth cancers:** Some people, especially those who used tobacco, develop mouth cancer after an organ or stem cell transplant.

KEEP YOUR MOUTH HEALTHY

You can do a lot to keep your mouth healthy after your transplant procedure. Brush and floss every day. Good daily oral hygiene is vital to keeping your mouth healthy by reducing levels of harmful germs. If you have any questions about brushing and flossing, particularly if your mouth is sore after transplant, ask your dentist or dental hygienist.

Look inside your mouth every day. Check how it feels with your tongue. Side effects from transplant drugs may show up as white or red patches, sores, or ulcers. You may notice dryness in your mouth, bleeding gums when you brush, or a growth. Call your dentist if you notice any changes or problems.