

DENTAL CARE AND PARKINSON'S DISEASE

Oral hygiene, like dental care, is one aspect of Parkinson's disease (PD) that can be easily overlooked. Symptoms of PD can present unique challenges in maintaining oral hygiene. In early stages of PD, the development of motor symptoms can interfere with tooth brushing and flossing. In later stages, possible cognitive decline, softened voice and diminished facial expression can make it difficult for the person to report dental pain and to describe the problems effectively. In addition, increased or decreased saliva production, complications of certain medications, chronic dry mouth, chewing difficulties and inadequate nutrition can contribute to dental problems in people with PD.

Oral Hygiene at Home

Motor symptoms of PD, such as loss of manual dexterity, rigidity, and tremor, can make at-home dental care difficult. Follow these tips for more effective oral hygiene:

- Use an electric toothbrush and a handle-style floss holder.
- Use your stronger arm for brushing.
- Ask your dentist about prescription-strength topical fluoride and chlorhexidine brushes for greater tooth protection.
- Talk to your neurologist if you have a dry mouth or excessive saliva.
- Make sure to clean your dentures. If you find this difficult, consider attaching a toothbrush to a suction cup on your bathroom counter, and move your dentures back and forth across the brush.

Conversations with Your Dentist

Make an appointment to talk to your dentist about PD. Your dentist may or may not have an understanding of PD, but they need to know about your unique symptoms.

The following information is important for your dentist to know ahead of a clinical appointment:

- the name and contact information of the doctor who manages your PD
- a list of your medications, vitamins, and supplements, and their dosages and timing
- your most challenging symptoms (particularly tremors, rigidity, dystonia, lack of facial expression, and excessive daytime sleepiness)
- whether you have swallowing and speaking difficulties
- if you experience dyskinesia (particularly if it affects your mouth) or teeth grinding
- whether you have excess saliva or a history of dry mouth
- low blood pressure concerns, and/or a history of falls
- how to help you if you experience an "off period" during your visit
- your anxiety levels relating to PD, and general anxiety relating to dentistry

Preparing for Dental Appointments

Anxiety during a dental appointment is extremely common. Planning and preparing for your appointment can make a difference to your overall comfort. Consider the following:

- If you need multiple interventions, book several short appointments rather than a single long one.
- Plan appointments around your medication "on" times.
- Use the washroom prior to your appointment.

- Ask if medications used during the treatment could adversely interact with PD medication.
- Find and agree upon signals with your dentist, that will indicate if you are uncomfortable, and to what degree. Be sure to have a signal for an emergency.
- If you have a tremor that affects your jaw or mouth, discuss the possible use of conscious sedation.
- At the completion of the procedure, sit up slowly and carefully, remaining seated for several minutes if necessary. Let your dentist know that you may need extra time to leave the chair.

Anxiety is known to exacerbate the symptoms of PD. Allow yourself time in the waiting room to recuperate after your appointment. Tell the receptionist in advance that you may do this.

When preparing for an appointment, also remind yourself to bring the following with you:

- a list of your doctors' contact information, and your medications and their dosages
- extra medication, in case you need to take a dose before leaving
- your Aware in Care medication card and form, with information on contraindicated medications
- a U-shaped pillow for your neck

Additional Resources

Aware in Care Medical Alert Card | bit.ly/awareincarecard

Aware in Care Medication Form | bit.ly/awareincaremedform

Sources

Noble, James M. (2009). *Dental Care Needs Extra Focus with Parkinson's*. Parkinson's Post. Northwest Parkinson's Foundation.

Scully, C. (2010). *Medical problems in dentistry* (6th ed.). Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone.