

Oral Health

Oral health problems (problems inside your mouth) can interfere with your ability to chew and swallow, take medications, and affect your overall health and quality of life if not treated. Regular brushing, flossing, proper nutrition, and twice-a-year visits to the dentist can help prevent and detect problems. Referral to a registered dietitian may be necessary to assist with eating problems.

Oral health problems commonly diagnosed in people with HIV/AIDS

- 1) Candidiasis (thrush) is a fungal infection that produces cottage cheese-like bumps or red patches on the tongue, gums and inner cheeks.
- 2) Oral warts, caused by the Human Papilloma Virus, are little cauliflower-like bumps that appear inside your mouth on your cheeks, gums and lips.
- 3) Dry mouth is often caused by medications prescribed for anxiety, depression, and high blood pressure and from antihistamines as well as some protease inhibitors. Dry mouth may lead to dental caries (cavities) since there is little saliva to wash away food particles and prevent bacterial growth.

What your dentist can do for you

Regular visits to your dentist can help detect the start of dental caries, gingivitis (mild inflammation of the gums caused by plaque buildup), and periodontitis (a more severe infection leading to bone loss). Your dentist can also diagnose and prescribe treatment for oral warts, thrush, Hairy Leukoplakia, Kaposi's sarcoma, canker sores, and dry mouth. Your dentist may also be the first one to notice if a condition seen in the mouth requires medical attention and refer you to your physician for follow-up.

How to prevent dry mouth

- ✓ Quit smoking.
- ✓ Brush at least twice a day or after meals and snacks. Not only does this prevent cavities, it also stimulates saliva production.
- ✓ Ask your dentist about prescription toothpaste, alcohol-free mouthwash, mouth moisturizing gel, or saliva substitutes (such as *Biotene* products) that can help dry mouth.
- ✓ Chew sugarless gum or suck on sugarless candies to stimulate saliva production.
- ✓ Use a humidifier at night.
- ✓ Carry water with you at all times and drink throughout the day.

Good nutrition when you have dry mouth or problems chewing or swallowing

- ✓ Have at least 8-10 small glasses of water a day.
- ✓ Avoid caffeinated or alcoholic drinks since they may aggravate dry mouth.
- ✓ Choose foods that are soft and easy to chew and swallow such as shakes, cream soups, hot cereals, scrambled eggs, noodle dishes, yogurt, mashed potatoes and pureed meats.
- ✓ Choose moderate-temperature foods that are not too hot or too cold.
- ✓ Avoid spicy, salty, or crunchy foods if they cause pain.

For more information or to sign up for a nutrition class call:

Janelle L'Heureux MS RD: 213-201-1556 jlheureux@apla.org or go to www.apla.org & click on Calendar. APLA copyright © 2006. For persons with disabilities, reasonable accommodation may be provided upon request. Please call 213-201-1582 TTY (for voice, call California Relay Service first at 711, then give operator the TTY number) at least 5 working days in advance to ensure availability.

APLA Dental Program

APLA's dental program is open to anyone who is living with HIV and is a resident of Los Angeles County. To make an appointment, call (213) 201-1388. APLA's dental program accepts Medi-Cal, private insurance, and offers a sliding-scale fee based on ability to pay. Documents needed by the dental program are, 1) proof of diagnosis, 2) proof of income, 3) a TB test result (within the last year), 4) Lab results of; viral load, CD4 count, CD4 percentage and neutrophil count that are less than three months old. Those with Medi-Cal coverage may also call Medi-Cal's information line at (800) 322-6384 to find the nearest dentist.

Food, cavities and the role of saliva

Food, if left on your teeth too long, can promote the beginning of a cavity. Bacteria in the mouth combine with food and can damage the tooth enamel making it easier to get a cavity. There may be no pain as the cavity forms until it becomes a more serious problem and more damage to the tooth structure has occurred. Saliva lowers your risk of getting a cavity. Saliva washes over your teeth and contains substances, which can reduce bacteria activity and help remove the bacteria and food particles on and between the teeth.

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Check out HIVdent at www.hivdent.com for easy-to-use, up-to-date information on oral health. This site also contains an extensive list of links to other websites with HIV & AIDS resources.

Remember these 4 simple tips for a healthy mouth

- 1) Brush after meals and snacks.
- 2) Floss at least once a day. Leave the floss on the bathroom counter as a reminder.
- 3) Drink water throughout the day to wash food from your teeth.
- 4) Visit your dentist twice a year.

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