



Study History Before Taking Your Oral Exam



The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) strongly believes that your oral health plays a very important role in your overall health. Research shows that poor oral health is an indicator of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, premature births, and osteoporosis. Being aware of this mouth–body connection is important in understanding that a healthy mouth means a healthy body, and vice versa. That’s why it’s important that you provide your dentist with a complete medical history and update your dentist should anything change in your health. Because when it comes to your oral health and your overall health, this is one “history” test you can’t risk flunking.

If you have been going to the same dentist since you were a child, or even for a few years, you may have filled out a medical history form at the time of your first appointment. This form includes questions about any past or present illnesses you may have, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis, and cancer. Your dentist needs to be aware of any medical conditions you are currently being treated for, since those conditions and any medications you are taking can have an impact on your teeth and gums—and potentially on any dental treatment you will be receiving.

For instance, diabetes has been shown to have a strong link to oral health. Diabetic patients with inadequate blood sugar control appear to develop periodontitis, a severe form of gum disease, more often and more severely—and lose more teeth—than do those patients who have good control of their diabetes. By making your dentist aware that you have diabetes,

she or he can keep a closer eye on the condition of your gums to ensure that they are in the best health they can be and to help prevent permanent tooth loss.

Because medications you are taking can have an impact on your oral health and dental treatment, be sure to provide your dentist with a complete list of all medications—both prescribed and over-the-counter, including herbal remedies—that you are on. For example, if you are on a blood thinner to help prevent strokes, your dentist should be aware of that because he or she may want to alter the dental treatment or even postpone it. Some medications can have side effects, such as dry mouth, which can increase the risk of cavities, so your dentist should be aware of that potential problem. He or she may also be able to suggest mouthrinses to relieve the dry mouth symptoms, so it really is important to disclose everything.

Prescription Precautions

Additionally, certain health conditions, such as diseases of the heart, may dictate the type of anesthesia your dentist can administer. Your dentist also will want to make sure that any medications he or she prescribes don’t interact with medications you are already taking. And it goes without saying that your dentist should be aware of any medications you are allergic to, such as codeine or penicillin. If in the time since your last dental visit you’ve been diagnosed with a condition or prescribed a medication, make sure to update your dentist at your next visit.

It may seem like overkill, but make sure you mention everything about your health, even if

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you think it’s unrelated to your oral health, including: any surgical procedures; allergies (including latex, which is important because some dentists and dental hygienists wear latex gloves); history of smoking (which can be a primary cause of oral cancer, something your dentist can help detect early on); and pregnancy (which has been shown to have a strong link with gingivitis, so your dentist may recommend more frequent cleanings during your pregnancy). Sometimes, too much information is a *good* thing.

Anything, and everything, can impact your oral—and overall—health. So even if you’re not asked, it’s still important to tell. 

For more information on the connection between oral health and overall health, contact the Massachusetts Dental Society at (800) 342-8747 or visit www.massdental.org.