Could My MS and Dental Issues Be Related?

by SHARON BOYD, RDH

Bridging the Gap

One of the biggest concerns that dental care providers have for patients with MS is the difficulty that they have managing adequate oral hygiene due to tremors or muscle impairment. Even without compromised tooth brushing, oral hygiene may be poor, with increased bacteria levels that can predispose someone with MS to complicated dental problems later on. Let's talk about MS and dental issues.

Dry Mouth

Xerostomia (dry mouth) is a side effect of MS or the medications taken for it. When the mouth is too dry, teeth decay at a much quicker rate. Keeping the mouth lubricated with moisturizing drops and drinking plenty of water can help to an extent.

Get Creative with Your Oral Hygiene Aids

Adding a Xylitol spray to your daily routine can decrease the plaque buildup in your mouth. The molecular makeup of Xylitol prevents plaque from clinging to the teeth (causing weak enamel). Getting five exposures of Xylitol daily from a spray, gum or other source is as effective as tooth brushing regarding the amount of plaque in a person’s mouth.

Using an electric toothbrush and water flosser will allow the equipment to do the work for you, as long as you can minimize the mess and place them where they need to be. Angling the electric brush along the gumlines and brushing for at least 2 minutes can drastically improve your oral health and reduce gingivitis symptoms.

Prescription Fluoride Is a Must

Topical prescription fluoride gels can accommodate the remineralization of enamel that has demineralized or is in the earliest stages of tooth decay. For best results, first brush thoroughly and then apply the fluoride gel immediately before bedtime without rinsing, eating, or drinking afterward.

At the Dental Office

Unfortunately, complications from MS, such as facial paralysis or pain, may make some dental problems difficult to diagnose. A detailed, comprehensive examination is needed to pinpoint any type of diagnosis in a patient with MS.

In very rare circumstances, pain from MS can be experienced as tooth pain due to nerve damage. Be sure to find a dentist who understands how MS can affect their patients, and if you’re not happy with your dentist, shop around.

Schedule your appointments first thing in the morning, and either set up multiple short or longer appointments with 5 to 10-minute breaks every half hour. It can be difficult to sit for long periods, so getting up and moving around will help. Adding a mouth prop can also make it easier to have your mouth open, and muscles relaxed as your dentist cares for you.

The most important consideration for your mouth is a good preventive care plan. Losing teeth due to decay or gum disease can jeopardize the well-being of a person with MS, because large removable prosthetics such as dentures typically do not work very well for them. If you've lost teeth due to the difficulty of caring for them, a fixed implant or implant-supported-prosthesis is a wonderful option.