



Your Oral Health

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Oral hygiene is an important part of overall health. Looking after your oral health can often get neglected when there is a tendency to focus on other needs related to chronic and debilitating diseases, such as Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) or Chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradicalneuropathy (CIDP). Still, healthy teeth and gums are essential for preventing infections that may cause GBS symptoms to increase, promoting proper digestion and nutrition and improving the enjoyment of food and social activities.

Part of looking after your oral health should include regular visits to the dentist, however people with mobility challenges may find visits to the dental office difficult. In this case, diligent routine homecare can help prevent dental problems.

A good dental routine involves:

- Brushing twice a day - after breakfast and before bedtime
- Using a fluoridated toothpaste
- Flossing daily
- Using a tongue scraper or brushing the tongue daily
- Eating a well-balanced diet without too many sweets
- Rinsing out the mouth after meals and sugary drinks
- Keeping mouth hydrated with frequent sips of water
- Scheduling regular dental visits, usually 6 months apart
- Any bleeding gums, tooth or jaw pain, or tooth sensitivity should be promptly reported.

When you do visit your dentist, let him or her know of all medications you are taking, including blood thinners. Your specific dental needs and medical condition will help dictate the course of treatment necessary as prescribed by your dentist. Also before making the trip to the office, make sure the office is accessible and knows in advance about any special needs you have. Try to book your appointment at the time of day when you are less fatigued and make sure you have time to rest after the appointment.

There are several symptoms of GBS that can interfere with adequate care of the teeth and gums. Fatigue, weakness, pain and sensory changes (numbness, tingling, and/or pain) in the hands can all challenge a person's efforts to brush and floss adequately.

The following strategies and assistive devices can help:

- Use toothbrushes with built-up handles (or cut a small slit in the sides of a tennis ball and slide it onto the handle of the toothbrush); use flossing tools; consider electric toothbrushes and flossing devices.
- Sit to brush and floss, if standing at the basin is tiring. Since nighttime is when food and bacteria have time to cause cavities, try flossing in bed.
- Allow a family member or personal assistant to help with tooth brushing/ flossing. We all need a helping hand sometimes!

Some medications used to treat GBS symptoms can cause dry mouth. Saliva helps to cleanse the mouth and teeth. A dry mouth is not only uncomfortable, it may cause bacteria to accumulate and may also interfere with chewing. You can minimize the effects of dry mouth by:

- Sipping water or sugarless drinks often
- Avoiding caffeine, tobacco, and alcohol
- Using lemon candies to stimulate the parotid glands (which produce saliva)
- Use of special products available from the pharmacy (eg. Biotene rinse/gel/toothpaste)

Your oral health is vital to your overall well-being, but you are not alone and can ask for help from your caregivers, support group and medical health professionals.

Disclaimer: This article was written to provide general dental advice. Nothing contained in this article is or should be considered, or used as a substitute for, dental diagnosis or treatment.