

PARKINSON'S AND DENTAL CARE

Dental health is one aspect of Parkinson's disease (PD) that can be easily overlooked. Symptoms of PD can present unique challenges in maintaining dental health. In early PD the development of motor symptoms can interfere with tooth brushing and flossing. In later stages cognitive decline, softened voice and diminished facial expression can make it difficult for the person to report dental pain and to describe the problem effectively. In addition, increased or decreased saliva, complications of certain medications, chronic dry mouth, chewing difficulties and inadequate nutrition can contribute to dental problems in people with PD. The following information provides ways to enhance home care and to help make your dental appointments more comfortable.

Oral Health Care at Home

Physical symptoms of PD such as loss of manual dexterity, rigidity and tremor can make home dental care difficult. The following are tips for more effective home dental 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 dry mouth or excessive saliva
- Make sure to clean your dentures. If you find this difficult, consider attaching a nailbrush to a suction cup on your bathroom counter, and move your dentures back and forth across the brush to clean them.

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, either way, they need to know about your unique symptoms.

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

- Name and contact information of the doctor who manages your PD
- 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 day-time 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 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

Your Dental Appointment

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

- If you need multiple interventions book several short appointments instead of one long one. Plan appointments for your best “on” times.
- Use the washroom prior to the appointment
- Ask if medications used during the treatment could adversely interact with PD medication
- Agree with your dentist on how you will indicate you are uncomfortable including a sign for mild discomfort plus one for an emergency, such as a choking episode.
- 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 dentist chair.

Note: 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 might do this.

What to Bring with You to a Dental Appointment

- A list of your doctor’s contact information, your medications and dosages
- Extra medication in case you need to take a dose before leaving
- PSCNO Medication Card with information on contraindicated medications
- PSCNO Help Sheet on Orthostatic Hypotension
- U-shaped pillow for your neck

Sources:

“Dental care needs extra focus with Parkinson’s”, Dr. James M. Noble

“Medical Problems in Dentistry”, Dr. Crispian Scully, Dr. Roderick A. Cawson

Based on a fact sheet developed by Parkinson Society BC: reprinted with permission. PSCBC gratefully acknowledges the British Columbia Dental Association for their assistance with this help sheet.