

MOUTH AND DENTAL ISSUES IN PARKINSON'S

Symptoms

Find out more
about mouth
and dental
health problems
when you have
Parkinson's,
and ways to
treat them



PARKINSON'S^{UK}
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SOME PEOPLE WITH PARKINSON'S MAY HAVE PROBLEMS WITH THEIR MOUTH AND DENTAL HEALTH.

This information looks at issues you may experience and simple things you can do to look after your mouth.

A healthy mouth will help you to chew, taste, swallow and speak properly. Strong, healthy teeth allow you to enjoy your choice of food.

What mouth and dental issues are common for people with Parkinson's?

Parkinson's symptoms and Parkinson's medication might cause some problems with your dental and mouth health (sometimes called oral health).

These can include:

- dry mouth
- difficulty swallowing
- drooling
- difficulty in controlling dentures
- difficulty cleaning your teeth
- increase in tooth decay

Dry mouth (xerostoma)

Saliva is really important for good mouth health:

- It helps you taste your food.
- It lubricates food to help you swallow.
- It is antibacterial and has enzymes to help you eat and digest food.

Without enough saliva you may experience a dry mouth.

A dry mouth can lead to higher rates of tooth decay and gum disease. It can increase your risk of getting tooth decay in the exposed roots. It may also cause dentures to become loose and hard to control.

A dry mouth can also increase the damaging effects of sugar on your teeth. Because of this it is important to watch what you eat and when you eat.

Some Parkinson's drugs can reduce the flow of saliva to your mouth. Tell your dentist

if you experience this as they can discuss options which might help. They may ask you what drugs you take, so take a list of your medication to your appointments.

Tell your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse too, as they may be able to prescribe different treatments that may not cause this problem. Saliva substitutes are also available. You can ask your dentist or local pharmacist about them.

The following tips may help reduce dry mouth.

Do:

- try to take frequent sips of water
- chew sugar-free gum
- use lip salve to protect your lips if needed
- remove dentures at night to give your mouth a chance to recover
- eat a healthy, balanced diet

If you are thinking about changing your diet, a dietitian will be able to help you. You can ask your GP about this.

Don't:

- smoke – it makes the dryness worse
- use mouthwashes that your dentist or doctor have not prescribed – they may contain alcohol, which can increase dryness
- suck sugary sweets to increase saliva – this will increase decay and other mouth problems
- sip sugary drinks between meals – this will also increase decay and other mouth problems

Burning mouth

Some people with Parkinson's complain of a burning mouth feeling. This can be due to a dry mouth or taking levodopa. If you experience this, speak to your dentist or health professional.

Swallowing difficulties

If you have Parkinson's you might experience swallowing difficulties because your jaw and face muscles have weakened. This can also affect how well you can chew.

Drooling (sialorrhoea)

Drooling is common for people with Parkinson's. You may experience this because you cannot swallow as well as you used to.

Drooling happens if you swallow less because saliva pools in your mouth and may overflow from the corners of your mouth.

Drooling can lead to a sore mouth and your posture might make it worse.

Those who have a stooped, head-down position can find it hard to seal their lips. This can make it harder to control saliva flowing from the mouth. So it's important to speak to your health professional for the right help and support.

You can also try these simple exercises at home in front of a mirror to try to help prevent drooling. They'll help you become more aware of what your lips are doing and how tight you need to hold them closed to keep saliva in.

- Close your lips as tightly as possible and hold for a count of four, relax, then repeat five times
- Smack your lips together
- Stretch your lips in a wide smile. Hold for a count of four, then relax.

Find out more: see our information on eating, swallowing and saliva control.

In addition, you can try aids to help you to remember to swallow. For example, a device with a timer that prompts you to swallow.

Your Parkinson's nurse can help you find a device that is right for you. A speech and language therapist may also be able to help.

Find out more: see our information on speech and language therapy.

Visiting the dentist

It is important to visit the dentist regularly. This will identify and treat issues quickly and prevent them from getting worse.

Your dentist will advise you how often you need a check-up. Get any specific problems looked at between appointments.

There are cleaning techniques and equipment that can make good dental and mouth health easier if you have Parkinson's. For example, a toothbrush with a bigger handle may give you a better grip. Ask your dentist for advice on what is right for you.

If you're unable to get to your dentist, ask if home visits may be possible. Many dentists do them or they can refer you to a colleague who does. Alternatively, they can give you information on how to get help.

Will my Parkinson's mean I need to see a specialist dentist?

It's important to tell your dentist that you have Parkinson's and how it affects you. Most dentists will be able to treat people at all stages of the condition.

But tell your dentist about issues you experience because of Parkinson's. For example, you may find you move a lot during an appointment if you have a tremor or dyskinesia.

If your dentist feels you need specialist care, they will refer you to a colleague on the General Dental Council's 'special care' register.

Dental surgery

If you have to have dental surgery, talk to your dentist about Parkinson's symptoms you experience and how these may affect your operation.

You should also tell your dentist about your drug regime so that you continue to get the right dose when you have your operation.

If you've had deep brain stimulation and you now need to have a dental operation, you will need to take antibiotics. This will help make sure that you don't get an infection or another issue that could affect your deep brain stimulation device.

Tips for people with natural teeth

It is important to clean all parts of your teeth, especially the area where the tooth leaves the gum. Don't forget to clean both sides of your teeth as well as the biting surface.

You should use whichever technique you find easiest. Your dentist or hygienist can show you some aids to help you clean between your teeth.

If you find cleaning your teeth difficult or tiring, you could clean one part of your mouth in the morning and another part in the afternoon.

Ask your dentist for help on choosing the best toothbrush for you. They will also be able to help you find the best way to clean your teeth and the gaps between them.

Your dentist may advise you on toothbrush handle adaptations which can help improve your grip.

You may find it easier to use a three-sided toothbrush or one with an angled head. A small head may also help you reach all your teeth.

You could consider an electric or battery-operated toothbrush, as the extra weight may help to reduce hand and arm tremors.

If you have a carer who cleans your teeth, they may find it easier to stand behind you like dentists do. Or, they could clean one side of your teeth from behind you, and the other side while standing in front of you. This could help your carer use their strongest, writing hand to reach all parts of your teeth.

Tips for people with dentures

If you have dentures, removing them will help you clean all surfaces more easily.

Plaque can build up on dentures, as it does on natural teeth. This can cause irritation to your cheeks, gums and the skin on the roof of your mouth.

You may find it helpful to do the following things:

- Always clean your dentures over a sink full of water. That way, if you drop them, you can avoid breaking them.

- Soak your dentures overnight in water and then brush them gently underwater.
- Never use toothpaste on your dentures because it's too harsh. Denture pastes are available.
- Cleaning your dentures with a nailbrush, soap and water can be as effective as using denture pastes or soaking solutions.
- If you do use a soaking solution for cleaning your dentures, follow the instructions. Leaving your dentures in the solution for too long can damage the plastic.
- Make sure your denture solution is not too hot, as heat can damage the denture plastic.
- Avoid using a soaking solution if you have metal dentures.
- Do not use bleach on your dentures.

- If you find stains on your dentures that you can't get rid of, ask your dentist to clean them for you.

It is vital that you get advice from a dentist about any specific problems you have. This will mean your dentures are working as well as possible for you.

Controlling dentures

If you wear dentures Parkinson's may mean you have difficulty controlling them. This could be because of:

- problems controlling your facial muscles
- loss of muscle tone
- dry mouth
- pooling of saliva
- poorly designed dentures
- old and very worn dentures

- loose dentures that rub parts of your mouth and cause blisters or ulcers. (Loose dentures may also make it more difficult for you to eat and speak properly.)

Ask your dentist to check your dentures and suggest any improvements. This will help if you find your dentures difficult to control.

General tips for good mouth health and avoiding tooth decay

Parkinson's can make it more difficult to look after your teeth and mouth health and might lead to certain issues including drooling, swallowing and dry mouth (see pages 3-5). The following general tips can help you keep control of these problems.

To keep up the very best mouth health and avoid tooth decay you should:

- brush your teeth twice a day with a toothpaste containing at least 1,350ppm fluoride. Ask your dentist if you are not sure about the level of fluoride in your toothpaste – they may be able to prescribe you a toothpaste with a higher concentration of fluoride
- use a daily fluoride mouthwash at a different time to brushing
- brush last thing at night and one other time during the day
- try not to rinse your mouth after spitting out your toothpaste

Your dentist may also advise a fluoride mouth rinse or gel to use when you are not brushing your teeth. This is important if you have a dry mouth as you are more likely to get tooth decay. They may also apply a fluoride varnish to your teeth, which strengthens the enamel.

Sugar

The bacteria in plaque changes sugar into acid, which attacks your teeth. Cutting down on sugar in your diet can reduce tooth decay.

The following can help you balance the amount of sugar in your diet:

- You should try not to have more than 30 grams (7 sugar cubes) per day.
- Try not to eat or drink sugary things more than four times a day. How often sugar is in contact with your teeth can be more damaging than the amount.
- Your snacks between meals should be sugar free, for example cheese or vegetables.
- You should try to restrict sugary drinks to meal times. Try drinking water or sugar-free tea or coffee between meals.

- Cut down on foods, such as biscuits and cake.
- Be aware of the sugar in fruit juice, smoothies, honey and syrups (like maple and golden) as these foods and drinks can also lead to tooth decay.

More information and support

The British Society of Gerodontology

www.gerodontology.com

British Dental Association

www.bda.org
enquiries@bda.org
020 7935 0875

British Society of Disability and Oral Health

www.bsdh.org

NHS

How does sugar in our diet affect our health?
www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-types/how-does-sugar-in-our-diet-affect-our-health/

Parkinson's nurses

Parkinson's nurses have specialist experience and knowledge of Parkinson's.

They can:

- support people coming to terms with their Parkinson's diagnosis
- help people to manage their medication, so they get the best results and fewer side effects
- make referrals to other professionals such as speech and language therapists and physiotherapists

Some nurses are based in the community, such as your GP surgery. Others are based in hospital settings and clinics.

Talk to your GP or specialist for more details on speaking to a Parkinson's nurse.

Parkinson's UK information and support

You can read our most up-to-date information at [parkinsons.org.uk](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk).

You can order printed information by calling **0330 124 3250** or visiting [parkinsons.org.uk/orderingresources](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/orderingresources)

If you'd like to speak to someone, our specialist adviser team can provide information about any aspect of living with Parkinson's.

They can talk to you about managing symptoms and medication, social care, employment rights, benefits, how you're feeling, and much more.

Call our team on: **0808 800 0303** or email hello@parkinsons.org.uk

We'll provide expert information over phone or email or put you in touch with an adviser locally.

If you'd like to meet other people living with Parkinson's in your local area, you can find friendship and support through our network of volunteers and local groups. Go to **parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups** or call our helpline to find out more.

Our forum is also a very active space to share and chat with others who really understand, at a time that suits you. Visit **parkinsons.org.uk/forum**

Thank you

Thank you very much to everyone who contributed to or reviewed this information.

Thanks also to our information review group and other people affected by Parkinson's who provided feedback.

Feedback

If you have any comments or feedback about our information, please call **0800 138 6593**, email **feedback@parkinsons.org.uk**, or write to us at

Parkinson's UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ.

If you'd like to find out more about how we put our information together, please contact us at **healthcontent@parkinsons.org.uk** or visit our website.

Can you help?

At Parkinson's UK, we are totally dependent on donations from individuals and organisations to fund the work that we do.

There are many ways that you can help us to support people with Parkinson's. If you would like to get involved, please contact our Supporter Care team on **0800 138 6593** or visit our website at **parkinsons.org.uk/donate**

Thank you.

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Improving life for everyone
affected by Parkinson's.
Together we'll find a cure.

PARKINSON'S^{UK}

Free confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**
Monday to Friday 9am–6pm, Saturday 10am–2pm
(interpreting available)
NGT relay **18001 0808 800 0303**
(for textphone users only)
hello@parkinsons.org.uk
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Last updated: September 2018 | Order code: INFOB0049

Parkinson's UK is the operating name of the Parkinson's Disease Society of the United Kingdom. A charity registered in England and Wales (258197) and in Scotland (SC037554). © Parkinson's UK 03/23 (CS3750)

