INTRODUCTION

We live in a fast-paced, high-pressure world, where stress is a common concern. Canadians are constantly connected, and daily environmental, financial, and emotional stressors are unavoidable.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Stress is defined as the feeling of emotional or physical tension and it can be triggered by many situations and events.

It’s your body’s reaction to challenges, demands, and pressures.

While stress is a natural occurrence, excessive stress is a contributor to a host of mental and physical health problems, including oral health issues.

Everyone reacts differently to stressors, but for some, it can be overwhelming, and can lead to unhealthy habits, including poor oral hygiene and poor oral health habits with adverse effects.

Although stress can’t be eliminated, there are things we can do to manage our stress and lessen the effects it has on our oral health.

THE LINK BETWEEN STRESS AND ORAL HEALTH

When we experience stress, we don’t often think about how it’s affecting our oral health and our habits. In times of excessive stress, dental care can be neglected, with individuals forgetting to brush or floss, and not visiting the dentist regularly. Other common effects of stress on oral health include:

- **Dry Mouth**: Often caused by medications used to manage stress-related conditions. Without enough saliva, there is a greater risk of tooth decay, gum disease, and infection.
- **Teeth Clenching and Grinding**: A very common reaction to stress, teeth clenching and grinding can lead to headaches and migraines, fractures of teeth and fillings, joint and muscle pain, receding gums, tooth sensitivities, loosening of teeth, and even complete tooth loss.
- **Canker and Cold Sores**: Stress puts our immune system under pressure, which can lead to breakouts of oral sores because our resistance isn’t as strong. Canker sores can be very painful, but are harmless, while cold sores are an expression of the usually dormant herpes simplex virus.

WAYS TO HELP MANAGE STRESS:

- **Relaxation Techniques**: Look for ways to de-stress and relax (stay active, get enough sleep, do activities you enjoy, practice mindfulness, relaxation, and breathing exercises).
- **Learn Coping Mechanisms**: Learn what coping methods work best for you (improve your problem-solving skills, talk to a loved one, simplify your life, learn helpful thinking strategies).
- **Healthy Diet**: Eat a healthy diet low in sugar and restrict caffeine and alcohol (be aware of frequency and reliance).

FACTS + STATS

According to Statistics Canada, 73% of all working adults ages 10–64 report at least some amount of stress.

Corporate Research Associates’ Autumn 2018 Atlantic Quarterly® Survey found: 85% of Nova Scotians surveyed agree that one’s mental health affects one’s oral health.

In the same survey, Nova Scotians reported that in the past 5–10 years, they most commonly experienced:

- 37% Teeth Grinding and/or Clenching
- 29% Tooth Decay
- 25% Dry Mouth
- 23% Canker Sores
- 22% Jaw Pain
- 20% Cold Sores


DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

You can also connect with your local Canadian Mental Health Association for stress reduction and prevention tools and resources—CMHA NS Division, 902-466-6600 or 1-877-466-6606.
TALK TO YOUR DENTIST

Your dentist is a valuable resource, make sure you’re sharing your oral health concerns and questions.

SHARE YOUR MEDICAL HISTORY

Your dentist can discuss if this may be impacting your oral health and recommend specific treatments.

STEPS FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE

As a province, we can always do more to improve the mental well-being and oral health of Nova Scotians:

STRESS AND ORAL HEALTH

INCREASE COLLABORATION

The dental team, mental health service providers, other health care providers, and patients need to work together to determine the best course of action to achieve optimal overall health.

REFERENCES

Canadian Dental Association www.cdaadc.ca
Canadian Mental Health Association http://novascotia.cmha.ca
British Columbia Dental Association www.yourdentalhealth.ca
Statistics Canada https://www150.statcan.gc.ca
Oral Health Foundation https://www.dentalhealth.org
Ontario Dental Association https://www.youroralhealth.ca/