

### ABOUT THE NOVA SCOTIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

The Nova Scotia Dental Association (NSDA) is a member-based organization serving the needs of more than 500 dentist members across the province. As a not-for-profit organization, the NSDA has been the voice for dentistry in Nova Scotia since 1891. Our mission is dentists helping dentists.

### REFERENCES

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## TALK TO YOUR DENTIST

### SHARE YOUR MEDICAL HISTORY

Sharing your medical history helps your dentist treat you safely and effectively.

Provide your dentist with a complete list of medications you are taking and why you are taking them. It's helpful to bring a written list of the drug, dosage, and frequency of use. Include prescription medication, over-the-counter medication, and herbal supplements and vitamins, even if you only take them occasionally. Knowing this information helps your dentist tailor treatment based on potential side effects of the medication.

Tell your dentist about any health conditions being managed by your primary care physician, any surgeries you've had, any allergies you have, whether you smoke, vape, consume alcohol or use cannabis, and about your family medical history.

Share any changes you've noticed in your oral health and any other oral health concerns or questions.

Keep your dentist informed about any changes to your medications or health status.



## DENTISTRY'S RECOMMENDATIONS

### ORAL HEALTH EXAM

Require a mandatory oral health exam for seniors upon admission to a long-term care facility and an annual exam by a dentist.

### CAREGIVERS

Continue awareness and education among caregivers of the elderly, individuals with special needs, and children about the oral health side effects of medications and the importance of regular dental care.

### PUBLIC EDUCATION

Ensure the oral health effects of smoking, vaping, and using cannabis are included in public education campaigns about these substances.

### COLLABORATION

Continue collaboration between dentists, pharmacists, and physicians and their patients, ensuring oral health is integrated into the conversation regarding overall health and the side effects of medications.

### INSURANCE PROGRAMS

Government should consider provincial Pharmacare coverage for medications to assist seniors with age- and prescription-related oral health issues.

2021

# NOVA SCOTIA ORAL HEALTH REPORT

## MEDICATIONS AND ORAL HEALTH



## MEDICATIONS AND ORAL HEALTH

Many people rely on medications to treat life-threatening illnesses, manage chronic conditions, or for minor ailments.

Prescription medication, over-the-counter medication, and herbal supplements/vitamins can all affect your oral health.

Your dentist is a valuable partner in helping you maintain your oral health while taking the medication you need.

Narrative Research's Autumn 2020 Atlantic Quarterly® survey found:

**52%** 52 PER CENT OF NOVA SCOTIANS SURVEYED REPORT THEY ARE NOT AT ALL AWARE OF THE SUGAR CONTENT OF MEDICATIONS THAT THEY OR A MEMBER OF THEIR FAMILY ARE TAKING.

**40%** 40 PER CENT OF NOVA SCOTIANS SURVEYED WHO ARE TAKING MEDICATION OR HAVE FAMILY TAKING MEDICATION INDICATE THEY NEVER TALK TO THEIR DENTIST ABOUT THE MEDICATION THEY ARE TAKING.

## HOW CAN MEDICATION AFFECT ORAL HEALTH?

Medication can affect your oral health in many ways. In some cases, it may require changes to your oral hygiene routine and how your dentist plans your treatment.

Some of the common oral health side effects of medications include:



### DRY MOUTH

Dry mouth is associated with many prescription and over-the-counter medications, including high blood pressure, anti-anxiety, antidepressants, pain, chemotherapy, allergy, and decongestant/cold medications. Without enough saliva, there is a greater risk of tooth decay, gum disease, and infection.

Try chewing sugarless gum and drink plenty of water to help with dry mouth. There are also other treatment options such as saliva substitutes and saliva stimulation medications. Your dentist can discuss treatment options and help you find ways to manage your symptoms.

### Multiple Medications and Dry Mouth

Taking multiple medications can increase the likelihood of, or intensify, oral health side effects such as dry mouth. Since we are more likely to take multiple medications as we age, seniors have an increased risk of developing chronic dry mouth and its related oral health issues.



### EXCESSIVE BLEEDING

Blood thinner medications, such as those used to prevent stroke or heart disease and some herbal remedies, can cause bleeding. Excessive bleeding can lead to problems during dental procedures such as treatment for gum disease or oral surgery. Make sure your dentist is aware of any blood thinner medications you are taking before scheduling a cleaning or other treatment so they can treat you safely.



### GROWING GUMS

Some medications used to treat heart conditions, some antiseizure medications, and some immunosuppressants can cause gum tissue to become enlarged and look puffy. Without proper cleaning, gums can become infected.



### INCREASED RISK OF TOOTH DECAY

Some prescription and over-the-counter medications and herbal supplements/vitamins contain high levels of sugar, leaving a sticky, sweet residue in the mouth, which can contribute to tooth decay.

### Children and Sugar-Sweetened Medications

Some over-the-counter and prescription children's medications also have a high sugar content and leave behind a sticky residue in the mouth, which can increase the risk of tooth decay. Help your child keep up with daily brushing and flossing, regular visits to the dentist, and rinse your child's mouth with water after taking these medications.



### CHANGES IN TREATMENT PLANS

Some medications can also affect anesthesia, interfere with antibiotics your dentist may prescribe, or otherwise negatively affect your dental procedure. Your dentist can tailor your treatment plan to avoid any negative interactions.



### A NOTE ON SMOKING, VAPING, AND CANNABIS

Smoking, using e-cigarettes, and cannabis can have a negative impact on your oral health with links to dry mouth, tooth decay, gum disease, infection, and oral cancers. Using cannabis in any form before going to the dentist can affect the outcome of your procedure, changing the effectiveness of medications or anesthesia you may need, increasing your risk of bleeding, and complicating your ability to heal.

## SIGNS

### SOME SIGNS THAT MEDICATION MAY BE AFFECTING YOUR ORAL HEALTH

- Frequent thirst
- Dry, red, or raw tongue
- Sticky, dry feeling in the mouth and throat
- Difficulty chewing, swallowing, or speaking
- Mouth sores or blisters
- Bad breath
- Hoarseness
- Burning or tingling sensation in the mouth and/or tongue
- A bitter or metallic taste
- Difficulty keeping dentures in place
- Stained or discoloured teeth
- Soft tissue sensitivity
- Bleeding gums

## HOW YOUR DENTIST CAN HELP

### YOUR DENTIST CAN:

- Identify signs that medication may be affecting your oral health during a routine dental exam.
- Provide advice on how to manage oral health side effects of your medication and recommend treatment.
- Collaborate with your other healthcare providers, such as your doctor and pharmacist, with your consent, to help inform a dental treatment plan. For example, discussing if a different medication with fewer oral health side effects is available, altering a medication dose before and/or after a dental procedure, or to get the names of the medications you are taking.