

YOUR Oral Health *& Rheumatoid Arthritis*

If you suffer from rheumatoid arthritis (RA), your oral health is at risk. Both RA and gum disease are linked to severe inflammation.



If you have rheumatoid arthritis (RA) you know the impact it can have on your body:

sore joints, swollen tissues, bone erosion and more. But RA can also make you more susceptible to oral infections. Even mild forms of RA may impact your ability to maintain good oral hygiene.

How so? Poor dental hygiene can lead to periodontitis, which is a gum infection that can cause more problems for individuals with RA. The infection from gum disease may get into your bloodstream, causing swelling and inflammation throughout your body.

Medications used to treat RA may, in turn, cause dry mouth, which can lead to a greater risk of getting periodontitis. Research shows that chronic oral conditions can impact:

- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Respiratory disease
- Stroke
- Low birth-weight/premature babies

Your oral health is essential to your overall health and well-being, so do your best to minimize inflammation. Brushing, flossing and seeing your dentist as often as he or she recommends can help.

When you brush, be sure to reach all the surfaces between your teeth and gums. Try to hold your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle to your gums and use short back-and-forth motions.

Many RA patients have found an electric toothbrush helpful. If



you use one, apply the bristles straight on to the tooth. Hold the brush vertically to reach the backs of upper and lower front teeth. Use a back-and-forth motion to clean the crevices on the chewing surfaces of your teeth.

Removing food debris from your teeth ensures that sugar and acids won't wear down the enamel on your teeth, which can lead to tooth decay.

Brush your tongue and the inside of your cheeks, too, as both have pores where bacteria hide.

Floss daily. Flossing removes plaque from the nooks and crannies that your toothbrush

(Continued next page)

Your Oral Health & Rheumatoid Arthritis

can't reach. Getting rid of those food particles will help reduce the risks of more inflammation.

Visit your dentist regularly for professional cleanings and oral exams. This is especially important for people with RA because you may be up to four times more likely to have gum disease than people without this autoimmune disease.

Your dentist will help you manage the oral conditions that can result from your medical condition. 🦷

FYI: More information on the topic can be found online at the TRICARE Dental Program's (TDP) Dental Health Center (uccitdp.com), the Arthritis Foundation (arthritis.org), the Academy of General Dentistry (agd.org), and the American Dental Association (ada.org).

Mouth care and RA

Tips to help people with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) stay on top of their dental health and prevent gum disease:



- Brush your teeth twice a day, or ideally after every meal; and floss daily.
- If you have difficulty gripping a toothbrush, use a modified version with a larger, soft handle.
- If flossing is difficult, try floss holders or floss picks.
- Use toothpaste that comes in a pump if squeezing the tube is painful.
- Watch for signs of gingivitis (gums that bleed or are puffy and red), and make an appointment with your dentist if they occur. Gingivitis is fully reversible with treatment, but if left untreated it can lead to the permanent gum damage and tooth loss of periodontitis.

Sources: American Dental Association (ada.org) and National Center for Biotechnology Information (ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/)

Fact sheets in United Concordia's oral health series:



• *Fluoride & Your Oral Health*



• *Oral Health: Infant to Teen*



• *Oral Health & Your Overall Wellness*



• *Oral Health for Kids with Special Needs*



• *Preventive Oral Care for Everyone*



• *Your Oral Health & Diabetes*



• *Your Oral Health & Heart Disease*



• *Your Oral Health & Lupus*



• *Your Oral Health & Oral Cancer*



• *Your Oral Health & Organ Transplants*



• *Your Oral Health & Rheumatoid Arthritis*



• *Your Oral Health & Pregnancy*

Download fact sheets from the TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) Dental Health Center: uccitdp.com