



SEPSIS AND DENTAL INFECTIONS

Infections can develop anywhere in your mouth—in your gums (periodontal), lips, palate, cheeks, and tongue, or within and below teeth (endodontic). A dental infection can be caused by tooth decay or a broken tooth that causes the pulp to become infected. The pulp is the part of the tooth that contains blood vessels, connective tissue, and large nerves. When an infection occurs in these areas, bacteria can move out of the tooth to the bone or tissue below, forming a dental abscess.

People who have an infection in the mouth can develop a serious condition called sepsis. Sometimes incorrectly called blood poisoning, sepsis is the body's often deadly response to infection or injury. Sepsis kills and disables millions, and requires early suspicion and rapid treatment for survival.

Sepsis and septic shock can result from an infection anywhere in the body, such as pneumonia and urinary tract infections, and viral infections like the flu, as well as infections like tooth abscesses. Worldwide, onethird of people who develop sepsis die. Many who do survive are left with life-changing effects, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), chronic pain and fatigue, organ dysfunction (organs don't work properly), and/or amputations.

SIGNS OF A DENTAL INFECTION

- Bad breath
- Bitter taste in the mouth
- Fever
- Pain
- Sensitivity of the teeth to hot or cold
- Swelling of the gums
- Swollen glands of the neck
- Swelling in the jaw

GET TREATMENT QUICKLY

As with all infections, an infection in your mouth should be treated as quickly as possible to reduce the risk of complications, including sepsis. Salt water mouth rinses while waiting to see your dentist may ease the pain or discomfort.

If your dentist finds that you have an infection, you will probably be given a prescription for an antibiotic. It's important that you take this antibiotic as directed until it is finished, even if the pain and swelling are gone. Feeling better does not necessarily mean that the infection has gone away. Also, ask your dentist if the infection can or should be drained. If it is possible, draining may speed up the reduction of pain and swelling. Your dentist may refer you to an endodontist or periodontist if your case is more complicated.

PREVENTION

Preventing infections from occurring in your mouth will help you reduce your risk of developing sepsis. Regular twice-a-year visits to your dentist are usually recommended for up-to-date x-rays, exams, and dental cleanings.

Good oral hygiene is the first basic step to preventing infections. These habits should be taught to children from early on to help them keep healthy mouths and teeth.

- Brush your teeth thoroughly at least twice a day.
- Floss your teeth at least once a day.
- Don't over brush – brushing too hard or with too hard a brush can damage your teeth. Ask your dental hygienist for the best way for you to brush your teeth.
- Don't use your teeth to open packaging, break string, etc. Your teeth are strong, but they are meant for chewing food, not hard objects, which can cause teeth to crack, chip, or break.
- Visit your dental office at least twice a year for a thorough cleaning and check up
- If you live with "dry mouth," either caused by an illness or by medications, speak to your dentist about ways to keep your mouth moist and healthy. Monitor any sores if any form in your mouth.
- If you have had dental work, including cleaning, watch for any signs of infection and contact your dentist if you experience any of the signs listed above.

INFECTION AFTER DENTAL WORK

Dental work, from cleaning to root canals, may cause bleeding and an opening where bacteria can enter the body. While dentists, hygienists, and dental assistants work to keep everything as clean as possible, sometimes infections do set in, just as sometimes they do after surgery on another part of the body.

The American Dental Association recommends that some people receive prophylactic or preventative antibiotics before they have dental work done. These are people who have certain heart conditions that could make them more prone to developing a condition called infective endocarditis. As well, it may be recommended that some people with artificial joints (like a knee or hip) take prophylactic antibiotics before dental work. If you have an artificial joint, speak with your doctor before you need dental work to see if this is recommended for you.

WHAT IS SEPSIS?

SEPSIS is the body's overwhelming and life-threatening response to infection, which can lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death.

What are the signs and symptoms of sepsis?

Sepsis is a toxic response to an infection. There is no single sign or symptom of sepsis. It is, rather, a combination of symptoms.

Symptoms can include ANY of the following:

- T** **Temperature:** Higher or lower than normal
- I** **Infection:** May have signs and symptoms of an infection
- M** **Mental Decline:** Confused, sleepy, difficult to rouse
- E** **Extremely Ill:** Severe pain, discomfort, shortness of breath

SEPSIS IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY. IF YOU SUSPECT SEPSIS, CALL 9-1-1 OR GO TO A HOSPITAL RIGHT AWAY.

To learn more about sepsis, or to read tributes and survivor stories, visit us online at Sepsis.org



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