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Antibiotics Before Dental Procedures?

Talk with your physician and dentist.



Taking a precautionary antibiotic before a trip to the dentist isn't necessary for most people; and in fact, might cause more harm than good.¹

Protecting and maintaining your oral health before and after any surgery is important. When preparing for dental procedures such as deep cleanings or extractions that have a high risk of producing high levels of blood-borne bacteria, your physician or dentist may recommend antibiotics before receiving dental treatment.

However, unnecessary use of antibiotics could cause allergic reactions and dangerous antibiotic resistance. In April 2007, the American Heart Association (AHA) revised its guidelines regarding the use of antibiotics before certain dental procedures. New research shows that only those patients with the *greatest risk* of infections may be advised to take antibiotics before visiting the dentist.²

Patients with congenital (present from birth) heart disease and those with artificial joints can have a heightened risk of developing infections – such as Infective Endocarditis (IE), an infection of the heart's inner lining or of the heart valves – after a simple dental procedure.¹ But for others, research suggests that infection is more likely to occur as a result of everyday activities (like brushing or flossing) than from a dental procedure.

It is always a good idea to speak with your dentist about your health conditions and any special precautions before undergoing dental treatment. If you have a heart condition or are recovering from a limb/joint replacement surgery, you should also check with your physician or specialist about your risk of developing infections from dental procedures.³

Most heart and some joint replacement patients may no longer need antibiotics before dental procedures.^{1,2,3}

Those individuals whom the AHA and ADA still advise to take antibiotics before dental procedures are patients with the greatest danger of bad outcomes from infections (and therefore for whom preventive antibiotics are worth the risks).

- People with artificial heart valves, a previous history of Infective Endocarditis, certain congenital heart conditions, & heart transplant patients who develop problems with a heart valve.
- For the first two years after a joint replacement, all patients may need antibiotics for high-risk dental procedures. After two years, only high-risk patients may need antibiotics before dental care.⁴

Did you know antibiotics may decrease the effectiveness of oral contraceptives?

The ADA urges women taking oral contraceptives to ask their physicians about “back-up” forms of contraception while taking short-term antibiotics for dental treatment.⁵

Be sure to ask your health care providers careful questions to learn whether antibiotics are recommended for your situation.

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¹American Dental Association (ADA), A-Z Topics: Infective Endocarditis

²ADA, “New guidelines regarding antibiotics to prevent infective endocarditis,” 2007

³ADA.org, Oral Health Topics: “Antibiotics and Your Heart”

⁴Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA), “Your Joint Replacement, dental procedures, and antibiotics,” July 2003

⁵JADA, “Antibiotic interference with oral contraceptives,” July 2002