

AVOID STRESS – AND ITS IMPACT ON YOUR ORAL HEALTH



Many people are aware of the physical and emotional symptoms commonly caused by stress. Like headaches and stomachaches. Or depression and anxiety. But did you know that stress can also affect your oral health?* It's important to recognize both the cause of your stress and your early warning signs. It's also a good idea to take steps to reduce your stress.

Oral conditions caused by stress*

Stress can impact your oral health in a number of ways.

- › **Jaw joint issues** – disorder of the jaw joint or chewing muscles. Can cause pain around the ear or face.
- › **Bruxism** – grinding of the teeth. Can occur during the day (especially when concentrating) or at night.
- › **Poor oral hygiene** caused by a lack of good brushing and flossing. Can lead to tooth decay and periodontal (gum) disease.
- › **Cold sores** – commonly triggered by dental treatment, stress and sunlight. (Caused by the herpes simplex virus HSV-1.)
- › **Stress-induced oral infections or sores** – may show up as ulcers, white lines or white or red spots.
- › **Decreased immune response** – can contribute to the development of periodontal (gum) disease.

*<http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/healthy-mouth-14/your-healthy-mouth/stress-teeth>. Retrieved February 17, 2015.

How to reduce painful symptoms

First, start by discussing treatment options with your dentist.

- › If you grind your teeth, talk with your dentist about getting a custom-fitted night guard. It can be worn at night to prevent tooth damage caused from grinding and clenching. The night guard also creates a cushion to remove stress on the aching muscles and joint tissues.
- › Avoid hard or crunchy foods when you're in pain.
- › Avoid tobacco and alcohol as coping mechanisms. These products can make your oral symptoms worse.
- › Try gentle massage, physical therapy or pain relief medications.
- › Talk with your doctor or dentist about prescription medications. Anti-inflammatory drugs can help inflammation of the jaw joint. Antiviral drugs may prevent cold sores.
- › To help reduce cold sores, stay out of the sun or use a sunscreen with at least an SPF of 30.

Make sure you talk with your dentist about any stress-related symptoms.

For more resources on managing stress and your dental health, visit Cigna.com/dental-resources.

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