

Your body is filled with many different types of bacteria—good and bad. The good bacteria help to keep your body and your mouth healthy. At times antibiotics may be prescribed to prevent an infection or to fight an infection caused by bad bacteria. This is not always required; antibiotics should only be used when the evidence indicates they are helpful.

What is the harm in overusing antibiotics?

If you use antibiotics too often, or incorrectly, the bacteria may develop antibiotic resistance. This is a protection mechanism that allows the bacteria to survive. In this case, the use of antibiotics is no longer helpful to kill the bad bacteria and may cause more harm by killing the good bacteria. Keeping the good bacteria is the best defense against bad bacteria. Some individuals may experience antibiotic resistance regardless of their use of antibiotics.

Are antibiotics needed for dental care?

There are generally two uses for antibiotics in dentistry: to fight an infection and to prevent an infection. The use of antibiotics will depend on a number of factors including your dental condition, the procedure as well as your personal medical health history. In many cases, antibiotics are not required.

Fighting Infections

Although an antibiotic may be prescribed if you are experiencing a serious infection, the antibiotics do not treat the underlying cause of the infection. In most cases prompt treatment of the condition is enough to clear an infection and eliminate the need for antibiotics, as in the following example.

TOOTH ABSCESS:

A tooth abscess is a local collection of pus in or around the tooth and is best treated by draining the pus. This should be done as soon as possible to prevent the spread of the infection to other parts of the head and neck. It can be done by a local procedure in the mouth, through a root canal or by removing the tooth completely.

Antibiotics are generally not needed if the pus is drained. In fact, scientific studies have shown that antibiotics are unnecessary for treating tooth abscesses.

Preventing Infections

In some cases, an antibiotic may be prescribed prior to dental treatment.

TOOTH EXTRACTION:

Most simple extractions do not require antibiotics—removing the tooth is usually enough to clear the infection. Complex extractions, such as removing wisdom teeth, may require a single dose of antibiotics prior to surgery.

IMPLANT PLACEMENT:

Your dentist may recommend that you use an antibiotic prior to placing an implant. In most cases, no further antibiotics are needed after the implant is placed.

MEDICAL CONDITIONS:

Previously, patients with prosthetic joints or heart conditions were routinely prescribed antibiotics prior to dental cleanings or other dental procedures.

Prosthetic joints: The best available scientific evidence now shows that patients with prosthetic joints do not require antibiotics prior to dental care.

Heart conditions: There are still a small number of heart conditions for which antibiotics are recommended prior to dental care. Patients are advised to consult with their dentist.

- Always update your dentist on any medical conditions, medications you may be taking, recent surgeries and/or changes to your health.
- Provide permission for your dentist to consult with your primary care physician in advance of treatment to determine if antibiotics are needed.

Early detection and daily mouth care can prevent dental pain and infection. Brush twice daily, floss at least once a day, eat a well-balanced diet and visit your dentist regularly for an exam to detect the early signs of disease.

YOUR DENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

To learn more talk to your dentist
or visit yourdentalhealth.ca or antibioticwise.ca



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