

# Health Awareness

## Oral Health And Cancer: A Guide On Prevention And Management

(NAPS)—Cancer. It's a word no one wants to hear, but every one should be prepared for. Individuals getting cancer treatment must make many lifestyle changes. People battling cancer and undergoing chemotherapy will have many new and often unexpected health complications that they will have to adapt their lifestyle to accommodate. Oral health is not often thought of as being part of a cancer treatment plan; however, extra attention to oral hygiene is vital during treatment.

Fortunately, there are steps to take to maintain a healthy smile and lower the risk of becoming ill during cancer treatment, or even prevent certain types of cancer from developing. Good oral hygiene and increased dental checkups are the first line of defense against developing periodontal disease during treatment.

### **Poor oral health may be a risk factor for certain cancers**

Studies suggest that individuals with a history of gum disease have a higher risk of developing certain cancers, including stomach, mouth, colorectal, and breast cancers. The mouth is the gateway to the body's organ systems, and when cell barriers in the mouth are damaged or reduced, it can lead to harmful bacteria entering the body. Missing teeth and inflammation due to gum disease have been linked as likely contributors to an individual's overall cancer risk.

### **Practicing good oral hygiene may prevent some types of cancer**

Oral hygiene can prevent many health issues, and some studies have shown that good oral health may also reduce the risk of oral cancer. Regular brushing, flossing, and annual dental checkups are vital to maintain good health and prevent disease.

### **Cancer treatment often causes oral health complications**

Chemotherapy can cause oral health complications, especially in patients with head and neck cancer. Side effects of chemotherapy may include dry mouth and damage to teeth and gums. Cancer patients can also experience



### **People combating cancer can get an assist from their dental professional.**

these complications due to radiation therapy, which slows the growth of new cells. Because of this, new cells in the mouth may become damaged, leading to cells having a slower ability to repair oral tissue and salivary glands. A reduced immune system and lack of helpful bacteria can make a cancer patient more susceptible to infection.

### **Patients should keep their dentist informed and make a treatment plan**

Oral health should be given extra attention before, during, and after cancer treatment. Patients should make a plan with their dentist and incorporate additional checkups and cleanings as part of overall care. Most carriers, including Delta Dental of Wisconsin, provide extra cleanings and benefits to those with cancer. Delta Dental policyholders can review their benefits via their member portal at [www.deltadentalwi.com](http://www.deltadentalwi.com) for more information.

"People undergoing cancer treatment should include their dentist as an integral part of their care team," said Dr. Greg Theis, Vice President, Dental Services at Delta Dental of Wisconsin. "After a diagnosis, it is crucial to check with your insurance provider as soon as possible to see what additional benefits may be available during treatment."

A cancer diagnosis is life changing. Once patients begin their treatment, they will have many new health considerations to manage. Prioritizing oral health and making a treatment plan with a dentist can prevent further complications.