**How Do Medications Affect Your Mouth?**

Generally speaking, medications are designed to make you feel better. Yet **all** drugs, whether taken by mouth or injected, come with the risk of adverse side effects. There is a significant link between your oral health and your overall health, and it is important to understand how medicines can play a role in your mouth’s well-being.

Medications used to treat cancer, high blood pressure, severe pain, depression, and allergies can have a negative impact on your oral health. Medications can cause complications that range from abnormal bleeding to enlarged gums, dry mouth and infections. That is why your dentist, not just your MD should always know what medications you are taking, including over the counter products, vitamins, and supplements.

As you’re about to read, common drugs can lead to serious issues with the overall condition of your smile. Side effects from different drugs and medicines can have some unintended and/or unexpected consequences. Here are just a few:

1. **Gum swelling:** Some anti-seizure medications and calcium channel blockers can cause a buildup of gum tissue, a condition called “gingival overgrowth.” The gum tissue becomes so swollen that it begins to grow over the teeth. This condition increases your risk of periodontal disease because it creates a favorable environment for bacteria, which can damage surrounding tooth structures. Good oral hygiene and more frequent visits to the dentist can help lower your chances of developing this condition.
2. **Inflammation of the lining of the mouth (Mucositis):** Mucositis is a common side effect of chemotherapy treatment. Doctors think that certain chemotherapy drugs trigger a complex pattern of biological changes that damage the cells that make up the mucous membranes. Mucositis causes painful swelling of the mouth and tongue and can lead to bleeding, pain, and mouth ulcers, which will make it difficult to eat. This condition is more likely to occur if you drink alcohol, use tobacco, or do not take care of your teeth.
3. **Dry mouth:** Over 400 medications are known to cause xerostomia or dry mouth. These medications represent more than half of the top 200 prescribed medications in the U.S. and include antihistamines, decongestants, high blood pressure medications, antidepressants, and medications for Parkinson’s.

Saliva production protects our teeth from the acids in our diet. Saliva also helps re-mineralize our enamel and provides antibodies to protect our mouth from infections. When a person takes medications that cause a decrease in saliva production, you are more likely to experience difficulty with chewing and swallowing, an increased risk of cavities, and changes in taste.

1. **Infections:** When diseases or medications disrupt the normal balance of microorganisms in the mouth, an overgrowth of candida albicans or thrush, can result. Medications that suppress the immune system, antibiotics, and inhalers used to treat asthma or COPD can cause an imbalance and lead to infections. Good oral hygiene and rinsing your mouth after using inhalers can help prevent infections.

It is vitally important to take any and all medications as directed in order to address serious health issues and to promote overall wellness. However, ask your doctor about possible side effects of the medications. Then you will better understand any potential challenges you may face.