

Improving Oral Health For Patients With Alzheimer's Disease Or Related Disorders (ADRD)

The Alzheimer's Association found that a staggering 5.4 million Americans are currently suffering from Alzheimer's disease or related disorders. This number is projected to skyrocket to 16 million by 2050, the most pressing epidemic for our aging population.

Patients with dementia are particularly at risk for untreated dental disease, and there are severe health consequences that can result. Among this population, nearly 1.3 million of them are struggling to receive dental care which is alarming.

Understanding Alzheimer's and Dental Care

Failure to provide patients who have Alzheimer's with good oral care has led to an increase in edentulism (tooth loss), denture-related oral mucosal lesions, gingival bleeding, a higher accumulation of plaque and calculus and a decline in salivary gland function (among other symptoms).

Dental Problems With Alzheimer's Disease

When an individual is diagnosed with Alzheimer's, it can cause a number of dental problems along with the effects of the disease. Some of the most common dental issues seen in elderly persons with Alzheimer's include:

- **Cavities:** If teeth aren't properly cleaned, bacteria can build up and eat away the enamel causing cavities.
- **Broken Teeth:** Fillings, crowns, and root canals can fall out or chip easily in older people
- **Abscessed Teeth:** An abscessed tooth is an infection that can spread quickly to the gums and is very painful. Take your loved one to the dentist right away as it can cause more serious health issues.
- **Dry Mouth:** Medications for Alzheimer's, blood pressure, depression, and allergies can all cause dry mouth. Left untreated, it can cause ulcers, sores, and cavities. It can also make it difficult to taste and have trouble digesting food.
- **Bad Breath:** Poor dental hygiene, dry mouth, infection, and medications could all be the reason your loved one is experiencing bad breath.

Alzheimer's Patients In The Dental Office

While getting the patient to the dentist's office is a difficult task on its own, there are just as many challenges once the patient is in the chair. Professionals experience difficulties

communicating with the patient, who may be confused or intimidated by unfamiliar people and surroundings.

The standard approach one would take for the average person could prove counterproductive and even dangerous for the dentist and patient alike. Professionals often find that patients with Alzheimer's are unwilling to cooperate, such as refusing to open their mouths or biting during the checkup.

Ensuring a Successful Dental Visit

Dental professionals and caregivers should both be aware of these steps that will help the dental visit go smoothly:

- Send the patient a reminder at least one day in advance
- Determine the patient's best time of day and schedule the appointment accordingly
- Make sure the patient empties their bladder before the appointment
- Maintain a quiet and private environment
- Keep the appointment length to a minimum
- Be sure to check if the practice accepts dental insurance

More Caregiver Tips

As Alzheimer's progresses, oral health can become more challenging. An individual may forget what to do with toothpaste or may be resistant to assistance from others.

Here are some tips for caretakers to better care for their loved ones with Alzheimer's.

Give short, simple instructions: The best way to explain dental care is by breaking it down into steps. Walk the person through the entire process like how to hold a toothbrush and apply toothpaste

The "Watch Me" Technique: It can be helpful for an individual to see what you do. Hold the toothbrush and show them how to brush.

Keep teeth & Mouth Clean: Teeth should be brushed twice a day. If your loved one wears dentures, clean them after meals and soak them in a cleanser overnight.

Be aware of Potential Mouth Pain: Investigate any signs of mouth discomfort during mealtimes. Refusing to eat or strained facial expressions while eating may indicate pain.

For more information on improving oral health for those with Alzheimer's visit:

<https://www.emergencydentistsusa.com/alzheimers-dental-care/>