



Mental illness and oral health

There is a close connection between the health of the body and that of the mind. There is further evidence to suggest those who experience mental illness also suffer with poor oral health.

Some of the most common mental illnesses that can have a negative impact on a person's oral health include: anxiety and panic attacks, depression, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, self-harm, schizophrenia and psychosis.

Some of the main issues for those suffering with mental illness include:

- **Neglect:** Research has shown that those suffering from mental illnesses tend to avoid dental care so much that their oral hygiene is neglected. This can result in [gum disease](#) and [tooth decay](#).
- **Anxiety:** Many people suffer from some form of [dental phobia](#) and as a result, stop seeing their dentist regularly. Infrequent dental visits have a severe impact on oral health.

Low levels of calcium are also common, which could affect the health of the teeth.

- **Brushing actions:** Over-vigorous brushing actions by those with bipolar as similar disorders could result in them brushing away the enamel on the surface of the tooth.
- **Medication:** they are taking may produce adverse oral effects, especially **dry mouth**, which is as a result of reduced saliva flow.

It is important for carers to be aware of the link between oral health and mental health.

Those people suffering with mental health issues should understand value of good oral health and be motivated to maintain good dental habits.

Three key messages:

- Brush last thing at night and at one other time during the day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Reduce the amount and how often they have sugary foods and drinks.
- Visit the dentist regularly, as often as they recommend.

As a carer, you should also play a role in helping those with mental illness to understand the harmful effects of smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol to excess and drug use.

By encouraging a healthier lifestyle, supporting them in a positive daily routine and making them feel more comfortable with accessing dental care, you can effectively manage the oral health of a person suffering with mental illness.

Useful resources:

- Preventive care and oral hygiene
- My fear of the dentist

- Dry mouth

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