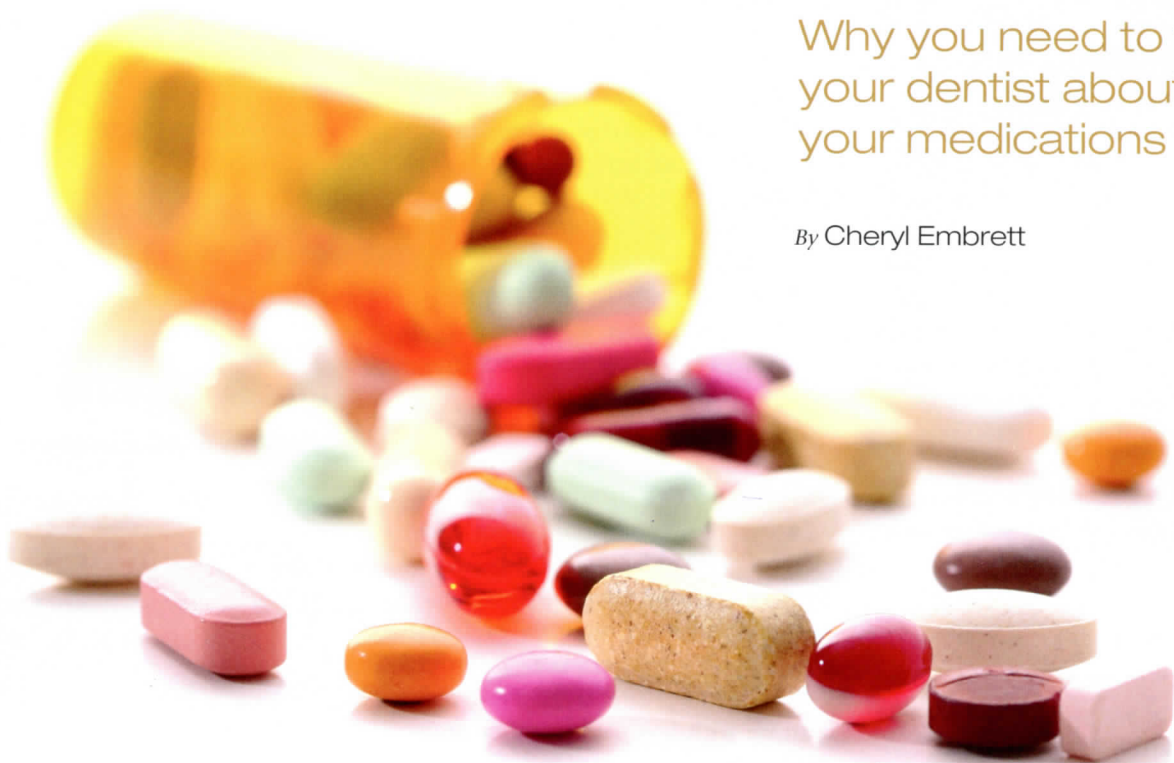


# Drugs and Your Dentist

Why you need to tell your dentist about your medications

By Cheryl Embrett



**You know it's important to** update your doctor on your health and medication status, but what about your dentist? Good communication with your dentist about your overall health is vital, says Dr. Lynn Tomkins, a clinical instructor in the Department of Oral Diagnosis and Medicine at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Dentistry and a Past President of the ODA. "What happens in your mouth affects your body, and what happens in your body affects your mouth."

Your medical history tells the story of your health, adds Dr. Arthur Worth, President of the ODA and a dentist

with a general practice in Thamesville, Ont. It gives your dentist with important information needed to provide the best care possible.

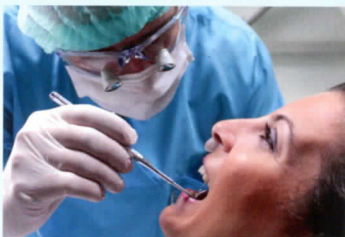
With so many different medications available, both over-the-counter and prescription, making sure your dentist is aware of everything you are taking ensures that any possible negative interactions can be avoided and appropriate precautions may be taken before beginning routine dental procedures.

Your dentist may also wish to communicate with your family physician to co-ordinate your oral health care with your medical condition, advises Dr. Worth.

If you've had a hip or knee replacement or have a heart murmur, for example, you may need antibiotics before any dental work in order to reduce the risk of infection. You want to be sure that the antibiotics your dentist prescribes won't interfere with any medications you're already taking. Your dentist is also in a good position to notice any changes in your mouth that may signal potential health problems. Bleeding gums, for example, may indicate the beginning of gum disease, which could also be related to diabetes if your gums have otherwise been healthy. Or they may indicate the use of blood thinner medications (see "Blood Thinner Alert!")

## Blood Thinner Alert!

If you are on blood thinner medications, **it is important that your dentist be made aware of the type and dosage you are taking**, says Dr. Worth. These medications act to reduce the body's natural clotting mechanisms. Since it is not uncommon for minor amounts of bleeding to occur during even simple dental procedures, such as tooth cleaning and scaling, it is very important to let your dentist know at least several days PRIOR to any treatment that you are taking blood thinner medications. Your dentist may wish to consult with your family doctor about the advisability of discontinuing this particular medication for a day or so prior to your dental appointment.



During your first visit, your dentist will ask for a thorough medical history, including lifestyle information (whether or not you smoke, for example). This history, along with the results of your initial examination, will help your dentist determine the best treatment approach. Mention everything about your health, advises Dr. Worth, even if you don't think it's important.

Don't forget about those medications only taken occasionally as well, adds Dr. Tomkins. For example, you may use a puffer only at certain times of the year when your asthma flares up, but you need to tell your dentist about that as well. ■

## Tell Your Dentist About...

Make sure you update and review your medical history every time you see your dentist, advises Dr. Worth. Here's a checklist of what your dentist will need to know to provide you with the best possible care.

- **All medications that you take, both prescription and over-the-counter.**
- **Vitamins.**
- **Naturopathic or herbal supplements.**
- Any **medical conditions** being treated by your physician. For example, chronic diseases such as diabetes, thyroid problems, heart conditions, autoimmune diseases and respiratory conditions such as asthma.
- **Antidepressants** – they may cause xerostomia or dry mouth, which can have significant effects on the teeth and gums. (See page 5, "Somebody Bring Me Some Water", for more information about xerostomia.)
- Any **surgeries** you've had, especially those involving the heart or joints (artificial knee or hip replacement, for example) or head and neck areas. Antibiotics may be required to prevent infection associated with certain dental procedures.
- Your **family history** – for example, if you have or had cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes, and any dental history of periodontal disease.
- Whether you **smoke** or **consume alcohol** frequently. If so, you may be at greater risk for certain types of oral cancer.
- If you're **pregnant**. Your dentist may suggest that you postpone certain treatments for the duration of your pregnancy.



Also, don't forget about **allergies to specific drugs**, cautions Dr. Worth. Your dentist and dental team wear latex gloves, so an allergy to latex is definitely the first thing you should tell your dentist.

