

Antibiotics before dental treatment

Preventing bacterial endocarditis

Your physician or dentist may have recommended that you follow special steps at home before your dental visit to safeguard your health. These steps may include taking antibiotics before your appointment.

Here's why: any time there is bleeding in the mouth, oral bacteria can enter the bloodstream and travel to the heart. This presents a risk for some patients who have cardiac abnormalities or other heart conditions. The bacteria may cause endocarditis, a serious inflammation of the heart valves or tissues.

PRECAUTIONS

The American Heart Association and the American Dental Association publish guidelines for dentists to help them protect patients at risk of developing bacterial endocarditis. The guidelines recommend the use of antibiotics before dental treatment, based on patients' medical conditions and on the dental treatment they will receive.

Premedication—taking antibiotics before the treatment—may be necessary for dental procedures such as professional tooth cleaning; extractions; incision and drainage of infected oral tissue; some types of injections; and some oral surgeries. Tell your dentist if your health status has changed since your last dental visit or if any of the following apply to you:

- had heart surgery within the past six months;
- had vascular surgery (replaced artery) within the past six months;
- have a pacemaker;
- have a history of rheumatic fever;
- have a history of heart murmur (mitral valve prolapse);
- had previous bacterial endocarditis;
- have a systemic pulmonary shunt;
- have a congenital heart defect;
- have acquired valvular dysfunction;
- have been diagnosed with other heart ailments.

Your dentist may consult with your physician or cardiologist to determine which antibiotics you should take. Fill the prescription before your next visit and closely follow the instructions for the dosage and frequency. Dispose of outdated prescriptions, which may not help you and might make you ill.

Periodontal infections and poor dental hygiene at home may spread heart-threatening bacteria. Take good care of your teeth by brushing twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste that displays the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance. Clean between your teeth with dental floss or an interdental cleaner once a day. And schedule regular dental appointments to have your teeth cleaned and examined.

If you are a patient with heart disease or you have a special heart condition, taking good care of your teeth and gums is a must—not just for a healthy smile, but also for a healthy body. ■

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