



Your Oral Health

Dental Health Information Series



Drugs and Your Oral Health

Drugs of all descriptions, both illicit and prescription, can cause imbalances in the oral environment that lead to dental problems.

With a large number of Australians regularly taking some form of drugs, it is important to understand the potential damage they can cause and how to manage it.

All drugs, prescription and illicit, can cause dental problems.

Prescription Medications

Some prescribed medications can cause tooth erosion (the gradual wearing away of the outer enamel layer of your teeth) either because they are in themselves acidic or because they cause a dry mouth which means that your natural defence against acid attack (saliva) is compromised. These include:

- Chewable vitamin tablets
- Antacids
- Anti-allergy medications
- Frequent use of aspirin
- Liquid iron supplements
- Certain asthma and cough medications
- Cardiovascular medications (diuretics, calcium channel blockers)
- Some antidepressants and antipsychotics
- Sedatives
- Central analgesics
- Anti-Parkinson's disease medications

This list is not exhaustive so ask your dentist to advise you if a drug you are taking could cause dental problems and how to manage that.

Illegal Drugs

The regular use of illegal drugs can also cause significant tooth damage. Drugs that pose a significant risk to your oral health are:

- Cannabis – can cause dry mouth and can lead to an increased risk of gum problems. The smoke can cause oral cancer.
- Cocaine – Users sometimes rub cocaine over their gums which causes ulceration of gums and the underlying bone. When cocaine mixes with saliva it creates an acidic solution which erodes tooth enamel. Cocaine and crack cocaine cause dry mouth, which further increases the risk of tooth decay. Often users will grind their teeth (bruxism) which causes the teeth to wear down.
- Ecstasy – Side effects of the drug include bruxism (tooth grinding), jaw clenching and dry mouth.
- Heroin – Often users can crave sweet foods, which can increase the risk of tooth decay if dental hygiene is neglected. Heroin can also cause dry mouth and bruxism (tooth grinding).
- Methamphetamine – This drug causes severe and rapid tooth decay. Dental professionals have coined the term 'meth mouth' to describe the extensive damage typically caused by this drug. Methamphetamine is highly acidic and attacks tooth enamel. Other side effects include dry mouth, bruxism and jaw clenching.

This list covers the most commonly used illegal drugs but the many other varieties that are available will all cause similar problems. Additionally, it is common that drug users can neglect their personal hygiene, diet and dental care and this will also exacerbate the effects of the drugs that they're taking.

For more information on oral health and looking after your mouth, visit www.dentalhealthweek.com.au

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