

Antibiotics Before Dental Procedures in Patients With Artificial Joints

Patient Fact Sheet



Normal Oral Bacteria

Your mouth contains billions of bacteria on your gums and between your teeth. These bacteria are usually not harmful when they are inhabiting or “colonizing” the mouth. When you brush your teeth, or have a dental procedure that results in bleeding around the teeth, there is a small risk that some of the bacteria may get into your bloodstream.

While this may sound concerning, people with a normal immune system are able to fight off these bacteria if they do get into their bloodstream. Because of this, people normally do not get sick after brushing their teeth, nor after dental cleanings or procedures.

Do dental procedures pose a risk for those with artificial joints?

In the past, some physicians and dentists believed that people with artificial joints should take antibiotics before dental procedures to prevent infections from developing in the joint. This is because they believed bacteria in the person’s mouth might travel to and cause infection in the joint.

However, a group of orthopedic surgeons and members of the American Dental Association (ADA) reviewed the research on this topic in 2012, and found that there was no reliable research evidence to support the idea that taking antibiotics before dental procedures prevents infections in artificial joints.

In addition, while antibiotics can be very helpful, and even life saving in some situations, there are also risks that come with taking them. Potential negative effects from taking antibiotics include:

- Antibiotic-related diarrhea.
- Adverse reactions to the medication, such as a rash.
- Possible decrease in the usefulness of the antibiotics, especially if they are taken for a long time. This is because bacteria can develop resistance to the antibiotics.

Suggestions for those with artificial joints when having dental procedures:

- ▶ **Discuss the topic of antibiotics with your dentist** before your next dental cleaning or procedure.
- ▶ **Talk with your health care provider if you have questions about whether you are in a higher-risk patient group** that should be considered for antibiotics before dental procedures. This may be considered if:
 - Your immune system is compromised because of a medical condition.
 - There are complicated circumstances related to your artificial joint, such as a joint that has been operated on multiple times.
- ▶ **Learn more** about the research on this issue. There is information available on the [ADA Center for Evidence-Based Dentistry website](#).

