ASTHMA TREATMENT AND ORAL HEALTH

How Does Asthma Affect Your Oral Health?

Your medications:

- Bronchodilators ("rescue inhalers" like Albuterol) can reduce saliva flow. Saliva is important for buffering acids and keeping your teeth healthy!
- Inhaled steroids can affect the plaque on teeth, increasing the amount of cavity-causing bacteria and yeast.
- Inhalers have a low pH, which means they are acidic, and acidity is bad for teeth! They also may have added sugars to improve taste, but that increases the risk for cavities.

Mouth breathing:

- People with asthma may breathe more through their mouth which dries the mouth and increases the bacteria that cause tooth decay and cavities. Mouth breathing can also affect growth and development of teeth, affecting tooth position, and increasing risk of the teeth not being properly aligned.

Reducing the Risk of Dental Problems if You Have Asthma

1. Keep your teeth healthy:

- Limit how often you eat sugars such as chips, cookies, bread, and crackers. These foods can stick to the teeth and cause cavities.
- Choose foods that are good for the teeth like vegetables, soy, seafood, and nuts. If you chew gum, choose sugar free gum with xylitol.
- Brush and floss daily. Brush with a fluoride toothpaste and spit when done. Avoid rinsing your mouth after brushing your teeth before bed to increase the contact time toothpaste has with your teeth.
- Visit the dentist and ask about fluoride varnish. This can also be applied for children at the primary care doctor up to 4 times per year.

2. Advice with inhalers:

- Rinse your mouth with water after using an inhaler.
- Use a spacer with the inhaler to let meds go to the lungs and bypass the teeth.

3. Talk to your doctor about possible solutions to decrease or eliminate mouth breathing.

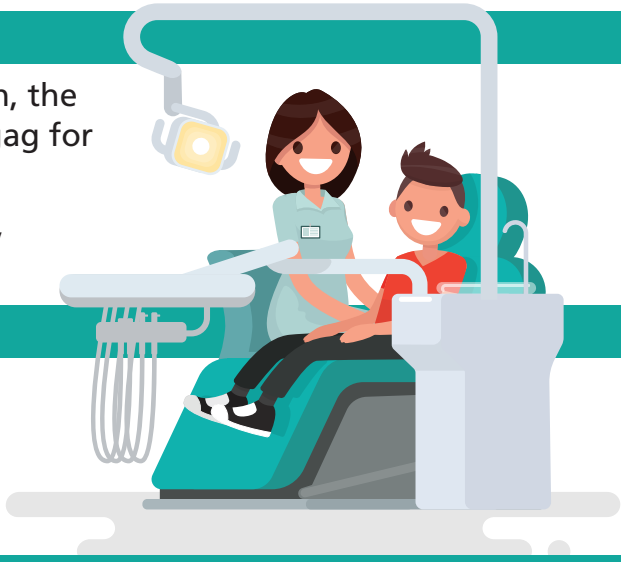
Don't have a dentist? Visit www.health.ri.gov/oralhealth and click "Find Dental care".
For children and young adults with Medicaid, visit www.uhc.com/ritesmiles.

ASTHMA AND DENTAL APPOINTMENTS

What to Know About Asthma and Dental Appointments:

Stressors:

- Dental appointments can be stressful due to fear of pain, the challenge of keeping the mouth open or trying not to gag for long periods of time, etc.
- Stress could trigger asthma symptoms such as wheezing, coughing, and chest tightness.



Preservatives used in anesthetics:

- Dentists use anesthetics which may contain sulfites, a preservative also used in dried fruit and deli meats.
- Some patients with asthma may be allergic to sulfites, which could also trigger asthma symptoms.

How to prepare for dental appointments for your child:

1. Optimal asthma control is desirable before dental treatment.

- Take all medications as recommended.
- Maintain recommended diet, exercise, and home routines.

2. Reduce the stress of the dental appointment.

- Tell them in advance about the dental appointment and talk positively about it. For example, "This is going to be a fun visit!" rather than, "I'm glad it's you and not me," or, "I find dental visits relaxing! You can just lie there and let the dentist or hygienist explain what they're going to do and do it!"
- Using rewards may make the child more stressed. Don't say, "if you're good at the dentist I'll get you a present," because children may worry in advance that the visit will be stressful.
- Talk to the dentist in advance to let them know if stress triggers asthma attacks in your child. The prepared dental team may use effective strategies (like offering distraction techniques and allowing patients to signal when they need a break) to reduce stress during the appointment. Create a written asthma action plan with your doctor that outlines how to effectively manage your child's asthma and share it with the dental providers.

3. Have the inhaler available.

4. Tell the dentist about allergy triggers.

- Examples of allergy triggers include dust, mold, and pollen. Even feelings of high stress can trigger asthma.
- Anesthetics without sulfates may be used if needed.

For more information about oral health, visit www.health.ri.gov/oralhealth.
For more information about asthma, visit www.health.ri.gov/asthma.