



SYSTEMIC HEALTH IN AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE: DENTAL CARE IS CRITICAL

Did you know?

- Oral complications contribute to autoimmune disease development, worsen patients' autoimmune symptoms, and lead to life-threatening systemic infection.
- Poor oral health greatly impairs quality of life.
- Treatment of oral infection has been shown to improve autoimmune disease outcomes and systemic complications such as cardiovascular disease (CVD).

Oral Complications of Autoimmune Disease

- Reduced saliva in Sjögren's, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis (RA), and scleroderma patients causes dry mouth and leads to rampant dental decay, tooth loss, gum disease (periodontitis), difficulty chewing and swallowing food, acid reflux, and oral infections.
- Oral complications are increased when oral hygiene is difficult, as in RA and scleroderma. In scleroderma patients, skin tightness narrows the mouth opening. In RA and related diseases, arthritis prevents daily oral hygiene.
- Common autoimmune disease therapies, including immunosuppressants, are associated with further aggravation of dry mouth, reflux, increased caries, and oral infections.
- Preventive dental care prevents major future costs. Tooth loss can be minimized with regular care. Dentures do not work in a dry mouth, so expensive implants are needed if teeth are lost. Good oral care prevents expensive systemic complications.

Oral Infection Can Lead to and Exacerbate Autoimmune Disease

- Gum infection may be directly involved in the development of RA and related diseases.
- Oral infection can lead to systemic-wide infection and cause CVD.
- Tooth loss, common in dry mouth, is linked to greater mortality from CVD.

Medicare coverage of medically necessary dental care for autoimmune patients will significantly improve whole health and reduce costs.

Please click the link below to see the Sjögren's Foundation 2023 submission to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) requesting Medicare coverage of medically necessary dental expenses for systemic autoimmune diseases. The following patient advocacy organizations provided support for this submission: Arthritis Foundation, Autoimmune Association, International Foundation for Autoimmune & Autoinflammatory Arthritis (AIArthritis), Lupus & Allied Diseases Association, Inc., Lupus Foundation of America, and National Scleroderma Foundation.

