Risks to Your Smile

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Oral Health Risks Associated With Bipolar Disorder

Did you know that living with bipolar disorder can affect the health and appearance of your teeth? One of the biggest complications is the side effects caused by prescription medications like the use of lithium therapy. By understanding the risks to your smile, people living with bipolar disorder can improve their outlook on their smile. Let's take a look at the part oral health and bipolar play together.

Xerostomia (Dry Mouth)

Prescription medications and the frequent use of lithium therapy makes xerostomia one of the biggest oral health concerns in people that live with bipolar disorder. Having a dry mouth prevents saliva from lubricating the teeth and gums, and almost always leads to large amounts of tooth decay as well as a risk for gum disease. Patients that battle xerostomia should be very careful about their diet, drink plenty of water and ask their dentist for a prescription fluoride gel to use at home. Adding xylitol gum or spray to your daily routine can also help prevent decay.

Stomatitis

Swollen, sore, red oral tissues can cause oral pain that makes eating or wearing a prosthesis like a denture very uncomfortable. Keeping the mouth lubricated is important, as well as taking out the prosthesis overnight. If you have sores that do not heal within 2 weeks, you should contact your dentist. For temporary pain relief, you can mix one part milk of magnesia and one part liquid antihistamine and rinse your mouth (just be careful not to swallow it).

Tooth Abrasion

Abrasion of the teeth is a common finding in dental patients with bipolar disorder. Brushing too aggressively or with a stiff-bristled toothbrush can cause enamel to be abraded from the teeth, as well as lead to gum recession. Always use a soft-bristled toothbrush with only enough pressure to cause gentle blanching of the gums. Electric brushes are a great way to help break the habit of aggressive brushing. If your toothbrush bristles splay out on your brush after a few weeks of using it, then you are brushing too hard.

Poor Dental Health Caused by Neglect or Poor Diet

Depression, poor self-care and an unbalanced diet can lead to an increased amount of bacteria in the mouth. In turn, this leads to tooth decay and gum disease across the entire mouth. Brushing twice each day, flossing daily and limiting sugar or carbohydrate-loaded snacks throughout the day are important. Purchasing an electric toothbrush can improve gum health, and a prescription for fluoride can help strengthen weak enamel that is prone to developing cavities.

Grinding

Clenching and grinding (bruxism) of the teeth may happen subconsciously, causing advanced wear of your teeth or even headaches. When the jaws are in a resting position, the teeth should not be in contact with those in the opposite arch, even though the mouth is closed. Having a bite splint made can prevent the jaws from clenching together and damaging teeth or restorations throughout your mouth.

Always schedule routine care visits with your dental office twice each year. During these visits, you'll receive a preventive cleaning, examination and necessary X-rays. Your dentist can assess if you're experiencing faster-than-normal wear or destruction of your teeth, and advise what preventive or interceptive measures should be taken. It's also important to inform your dentist of medications that you're taking, as this can affect prescriptions that your dentist may need to write for you, or what types of local anesthetic to use during treatments.