Keeping a Healthy Smile When You Have COPD

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What Can COPD Mean for Your Healthy Smile?

There has been recent clinical research that suggests people with periodontal disease, or gum disease, may find the health of their gums is a risk factor for the severity of their chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) symptoms. Let's take a look at COPD and dental care.

Bacteria present underneath the gums of people with periodontal disease may contribute to the number of bacteria in the lungs, and the studies suggest treating the periodontal disease condition could perhaps improve the function of the lungs in people with COPD.

Battling gum disease is an effective way to decrease the risk of developing more serious COPD conditions. To eliminate the presence of gum disease bacteria, it’s important to see your dentist for regular cleanings and periodontal therapy as needed.

Procedures such as a deep cleaning can remove active bacterial plaque in areas that brushing and flossing do not. Eliminating this bacteria on a professional level is the first step to managing the condition at home.

Your dentist can determine whether or not you have gum disease based on a periodontal screening, as well as checking for risk factors, including:

- Heavy tartar buildup.
- Gum recession.
- Bleeding.
- Swollen, discolored gums.
- Bad breath.
- Bone loss visible on X-rays.

During a periodontal screening, the depth of the pocket around the teeth is measured, establishing a baseline reading for future assessments to be compared against. Thankfully, battling oral bacteria proactively can allow the presence of gum disease to be eliminated or even reversed.

During Your Dental Visit

When visiting the dentist, patients with severe COPD should also be placed on supplemental oxygen through the nose piece delivery system that is in place for nitrous oxide.

If you use an inhaler, always have it with you during your dental appointment, with it set out and easily accessible should you need it. Always ensure that your dentist knows about your full medical history, as certain types of local anesthetics may be linked with causing flare-ups of the condition.

An Effective Oral Care Plan

To efficiently remove bacteria that cause gum disease, it’s important to have something that removes plaque between your teeth and deep below your gums. Traditionally, this means flossing, and we all know that flossing is something that only an extremely rare portion of the population enjoys doing.

Instead, I suggest using an electronic water flosser. Water flossers have been shown to reach into periodontal pockets as deep as 7mm and remove biofilm that floss cannot.

If you decide to stick with regular floss, wrap it tightly around each tooth and slide it up and down several times under the gumlines. Healthy gums will not bleed when you floss (although smoking can cover this up).

If you’ve already been told that you have gum disease, and you’re battling COPD, then it’s time to take charge of your mouth before it takes charge of you.